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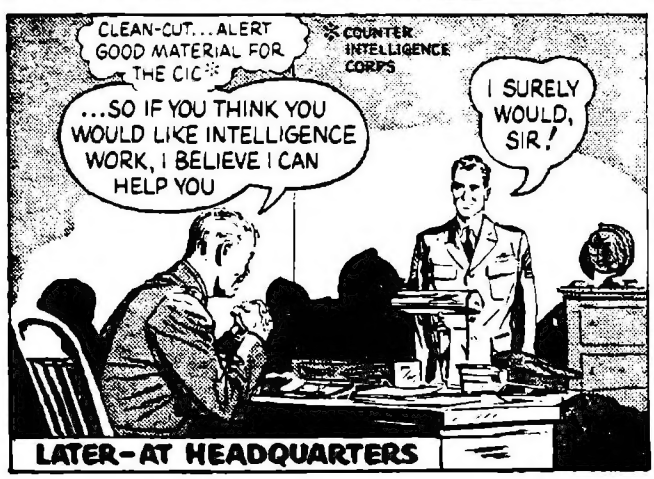
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AUGUST, 1952

MARY GNAEDINGER, Editor

VOL. 13 NO. 5

Full Length Feature

THE WHITE WOLF — **Franklin Gregory** — **12**

What irresistible, unnameable evil drew Sara Camp-d'Avesnes to a strangely familiar hovel in Philadelphia's reeking slums? And what connection had her odd disappearances with the horror that shocked the Pennsylvania countryside?

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Novelette

THE GREEN SPLOTCHES — **T. S. Stribling** — **76**

Helplessly, prisoners of their own terror, they waited for whatever unearthly doom would descend upon them. . . . For scientists and savages alike sensed the strange menace utterly new to mankind, forecast in the frightful manifestation

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Features

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT — **6**

IN THE NEXT ISSUE — **41**

•

THE NEXT ISSUE
WILL BE ON SALE JULY 18.

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THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

Address comments to the Letter Editor, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, Popular Publications, Inc., 205 E. 42nd St., New York 17, N. Y.

FROM YOUR EDITOR

Dear Readers:

The two long stories in this issue are well-known landmarks in the march of Fantasy. A list of the best werewolf stories will always include "The White Wolf" by Franklin Gregory, and "The Green Splotches" by T. S. Stribling is another classic which belongs without question in the fore ranks of the field.

I have picked up some interesting bits about Mr. Gregory which I shall pass on to you, and which I have every reason to believe are correct.

Franklin Gregory is a forty-three year old newspaperman whose earliest ambition was to play the piano. But upon graduating from an Iowa conservatory of music, he decided to become an architect. He didn't gratify that ambition, either, and finally he studied journalism at the University of Iowa.

He wrote eight novels before selling "Cipher of Death", published in 1934. After that he sold several other novels and worked on newspapers. Still later "The White Wolf" made a big success, and at that time he was working for the *Philadelphia Record* and living in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, setting of the story.

Most of the last two years he spent roving the back corners of the Far East, as a public relations man for the C.A.R.E. organization. Since his recent return to this country he is back at newspaper work in New Jersey.

At odd intervals, his literary agent tells me, he has worked on railroad section gangs, as a dishwasher, a short order cook, farmhand, timekeeper, sausage maker and chicken picker.

Thomas Sigismund Stribling you will probably remember best as the winner of the Pulitzer prize in literature for "The Store" and as one of America's most distinguished writers on people of the South, especially Tennessee hill folk.

Mr. Stribling was born in 1881 in Clifton, Tennessee. His famous books forming a series written around country town life in the South are "The Forge", "The Store", "The Unfinished Cathedral" and "Birthright". His stories of Tennessee hill people are "Teeftallow" and "Bright Metal". He has written a number of other well-known novels. "The Green Splotches" first appeared in Popular Publications' *Adventure Magazine.*

Sincerely,
Mary Gnaedinger.

A FRIEND THROUGH THE YEARS

Dear Mary Gnaedinger:

In "The Death Maker" you presented to us one of the best stories to appear in F.F.M. for some time. Well, I can't exactly say that, either, because how long is "some time"? Since 1950, then, shall we say? No, I can't say that, either, because in the January 1951 issue you presented "Brood of the Witch-Queen" by Rohmer which was an excellent story. Shortly after came "War of the Worlds." Then came "Rebirth" and "The Gray Mahatma" in close succession. And now we have "The Death Maker." However, this last story did show some very fine points, causing it to be slightly outstanding even among such fine company. Congratulations and thank you.

"The New Sun" by Fletcher was rather good, contrary to what I had expected. However, I almost invariably find that fantasy stories are usually poorer than science-fiction short stories. I wonder why. Myself, I prefer novels.

To your "Editorial" if such a short note may be called an editorial. No, Miss G., please keep F.F.M. pure fts and not s-f. As has been pointed out, F.F.M. is the last stronghold we have in fts (until F.N. is revived—plug!) while there are many s-f mags. Although I enjoyed Heinlein a few issues back, I would much rather not see him at all than see him in F.F.M. He's an unquestioned master, but not in the fts field. Let's keep F.F.M. what it always has been—fantasy!

(Continued on page 8)

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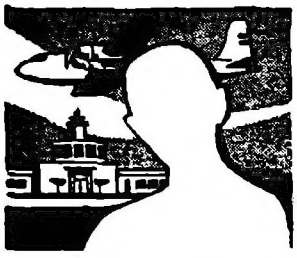

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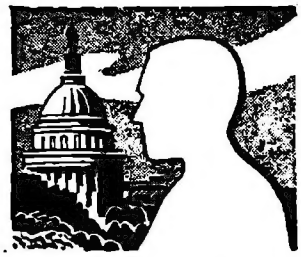

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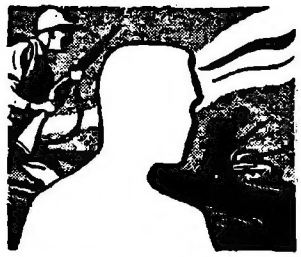
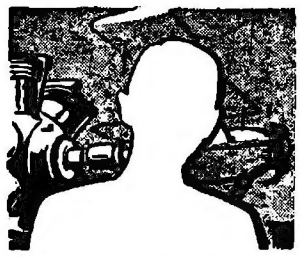


INVENTOR of a well-known U. S. Army rifle.



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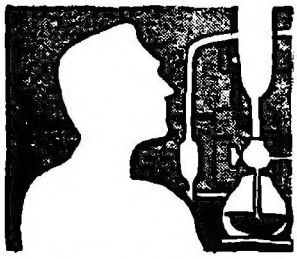
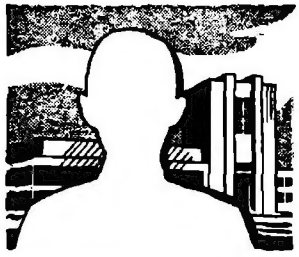
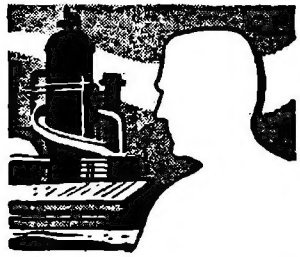


CHEMICAL director of nationally known research laboratory.



ENGINEER in charge of a famous company's engineering laboratory.



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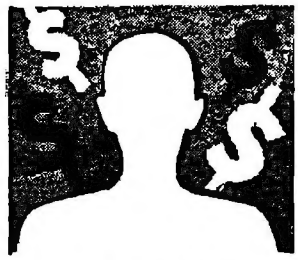

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(Continued from page 6)

But there is always the question as to what is fantasy and what is s-f. For my part, I think much of what F.F.M. has printed in the past is almost s-f, and that was acceptable to the readers at the time. For instance, there was "Space Station No. 1" in your very first issue, followed by "On the Brink of 2000," "The Sun Makers" and sequel, "Ark of Fire" (one of my favorites in F.F.M., by the way), perhaps "The Adventure of Wyndham Smith" and a few others bordering so closely that delineation is next to impossible. We *want* fts in F.F.M., but we have accepted s-f in the past and we may do so in the future. In fact, we would well like it, if there were more markets for fts so we could have both.

Oh, by the way, thanks for printing my letter about my new fanzine, OOPSLA, in your April issue. OOPSLA is coming along nicely just now. I'm publishing 9 times a year, one of those being the annual, and charging 10c per or all eight and the annual for $1.

F.F.M. is wonderful proof of your editing ability, Mrs. G., and I wish it a long and prosperous life.

GREGG CALKINS.

761 Oakley St.
Salt Lake City 16,
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A FINE SUMMING-UP

The "Death Maker" was a very good yarn and the short was passable. What's wrong with Lawrence? The cover looked as if it would be more at home on something like *Startling Mystery Comics*.

I had the pleasure of meeting one of my fellow readers here in St. Paul, named Ray Halle. We got so well acquainted, in fact, that we plan to take a trip down through Mexico and maybe to South America in the summer. So your mag has accomplished something in bringing two adventurers together.

Being a lover of both fantasy and the movies I am very happy to see Hollywood's assembly lines are getting their teeth in this sort of stuff. People who have television in their vicinity can also see some passable science fiction yarns on a program called "Tales of Tomorrow."

Looking over my mags from 1950 on, I find my favorite stories are: "Mrs. Amworth," "The Time Machine," "The Woman Who Couldn't Die," "The Disintegration Machine," "The Threshold of Fear," "Lukundoo," "The War of the Worlds," "Nobody's House," "The Book," and "Blight." How about the other readers sending in their choices of the best ten stories F.F.M. has ever published?

My selections would be (not necessarily in order of preference) 1. "The Blind Spot." 2. "The Spot of Life." 3. "Beyond the Great Oblivion." 4. "The Colour Out of Space." 5. "The Elixir of Hate." 6. "The Ark of Fire." 7. The Man Who Was Thursday." 8. "The Boats of the *Glen Carrig*." 9. "The Star Rover." 10. "The War of the Worlds."

While I am at it, I'll name the best that F.N. and A.M.F. had to offer. F.N.: "The Terrible Three," "Seven Footprints to Satan," and "Between Worlds." A.M.F. "Creep, Shadow!", "The Ninth Life." I don't imagine that anyone will agree with me.

RICHARD READER.
(The Devil of Saint Paul)

ABOUT SCIENCE FICTION IN F.F.M.

I have just finished reading the April, 1952, issue of F.F.M., and must congratulate you on its excellence.

"The Death Maker" by that inimitable master of the macabre, Austin Small, was truly magnificent. The excellent characterization of this tale sets it apart from some of his other works.

"The New Sun" by J. S. Fletcher was very well done, but it had a horribly old plot. I don't know how many books and stories I've read dealing with the destruction of Earth by a comet or star, but they surely must number somewhere in the thousands. Nevertheless, the writing was smooth and it did build up some tension near the end, so the antiquity of the plot can, perhaps, be overlooked.

I would like to make a comment on your editorial-letter if I may, Mrs. Gnaedinger, wherein you state that there are "some stories that verge on science and still remain fantastic, such as those dealing with "space-travel" and that you "would think a few of these would be acceptable."

Now, I am a science-fiction fan, along with fantasy. But when I open a regular science-fiction magazine, I expect to read science-fiction. When I open one of these and read about a rocketship to the stars, even though much less technical, I am reading a story, which, because of scientific accomplishments today, is liable to become fact in the future. And it is therefore science-*fiction*. When I open *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* and read a story about a war between Atlantis and Mu, etc., I am reading something which either cannot come to realization in the future, or certainly could not surely be expected, basing our ideas on the science of today, to have happened in the past.

This, therefore is labeled fantasy. Let there be no hodge-podge arrangement among the two in F.F.M. as there is in some other magazines. "The New Sun" in this issue was science-fiction, even though of a poor standard, and you can see by now how this one piece pulled the April edition down from the very peak of excellence to merely an extremely good one. Please let us recognize the very extreme difference between science-fiction and fantasy, and observe this difference. And F.F.M. will continue to have a faithful and pleased following.

Very truly yours,
ROBERT D. MCNAMARA.

50 Plaza St.,
Brooklyn 17,
N. Y.

ENJOYED "THE DEATH MAKER"

I have just finished the April F.F.M. I liked the lead novel, "The Death Maker" by Austin Small, a lot—even though it was written around that tired old "mad scientist" theme. The plot was pure hack, the treatment was pure joy. The writing was very good, indeed, and the small inci-

(Continued on page 10)

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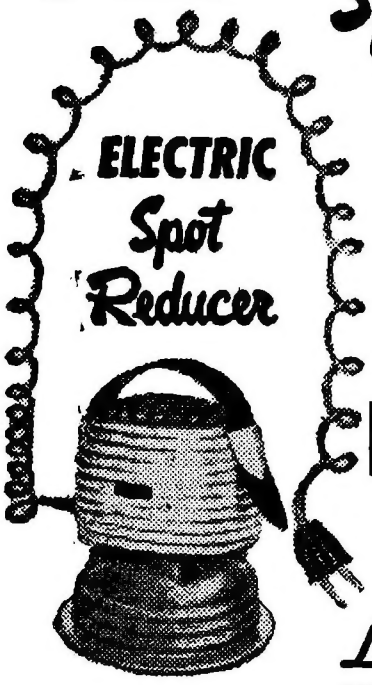

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LOSE WEIGHT OR NO CHARGE

(Continued from page 8)

dents and sub-plots make it worth reading. Also Lawrence's illos and cover were lovely things. In fact, all F.F.M.'s art is good.

Finlay was good on "The New Sun," but for the story itself—well, no magazine is perfect, and it *is* good to have all the old *Argosy* stories.

The choice for the next issue—"Her Ways Are Death," by Jack Mann—looks like an excellent one. I hope you have a beautiful Finlay or Lawrence cover to go with it.

I think it was Robert E. Briney who kept plugging for "The Woman Who Couldn't Die" until you printed it. That was a good story, and so, I want to plug for a few stories, myself.

Firstly, it is imperative that you print HPL's "Dream Quest of Ancient Kadath." You just *have* to. Then you can print anything by Chesterton and W. H. Hodgson.

I've done about everything that one does in a letter to F.F.M., so I'll sign off. No, I'm not going to plug a fan-club for people to join. Especially, I'm not going to mention The Little Monsters of America in which membership can be obtained by sending a buck to Lynn Hickman of 408 West Bell St., Statesville, North Carolina. And I won't say that this club puts out one of the finest fan-mags (besides a free unofficial little mag) in the U. S. or anywhere. No, at least I won't bother you with *that*.

FRED CHAPPELLE.

Box 182
Canton, N. C.

ISFCC ANNOUNCEMENT

I have the April issue of F.F.M. at hand, and it appears to be up to your usual high standards. I am lacking just two of *Fantastic Novels'* published twenty-five issues—November, 1940 and April, 1941. I would like copies of these in good condition without parting with a small fortune.

Once again in this column I would like to announce that the International Science Fiction Correspondence Club, commonly known by its initials—ISFCC—is continually seeking to enlarge its membership. It is my personal wish that we may some day be able to number among our members every active science-fantasy fan.

Ours is an organization intended for those fans who like to exchange letters. For their benefit we have a club magazine which contains material submitted by various members and departments for their use. Among the departments are "Kollector's Korner," which is really a page listing members' interests and hobbies, a "Trading Corner" which is what the name implies and a pen-pal department. We also have a circulating library of about seventy titles, but this is momentarily bogged down.

The only expense is fifty cents for a year's subscription to this mag. For further information, write me at Lyons Falls, N. Y. or Ed Noble, Jr., editor of the magazine, *The Explorer*, at R.F.D. #1, Townline Road, Erie, Pa.

ROBERT P. HOSKINS.

1 Thurlow Terrace,
Albany 3, N. Y.

ASKING FOR SAX ROHMER

For Lovecraft fans. . . I have "Best Supernatural Stories of H. P. Lovecraft", edited by A. Derleth. I have several copies of this book which I will sell for $1.00 per copy. Anyone wishing to buy this book, please contact me. Oh, yes, and please keep F.F.M. coming. It's a swell mag. A suggestion—how about something by Sax Rohmer?

Fantastically Yours,
MAURICE LUBIN.

125 Sherman St.,
Portland, Maine.

LIKES OUR COVERS

I am a little behind in my reading of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, having just finished reading "The Gray Mahatma" in the December issue. I enjoyed it very much, more so than "Rebirth" in the October issue.

I have been reading F.F.M. and F.N. since 1946 and have been very happy to read some of the old stories that have been printed in the two magazines. I will not say that I enjoyed all the stories equally because to my thinking some were much better than others.

I am very happy with the covers on your magazine. The detail is always very clear and the colors beautiful. Keep them the way they are, by all means. As to interior illustrations you have top artists. I personally like Virgil Finlay but I also like to have the picture illustrate something in the story, and Finlay's pictures always seem to me to be symbolical.

Boiled down, I like the magazine a lot and these are just my opinions and I thought I would write and tell you about them.

THOMAS W. MCCALVY.

1985 East Minnehaha Ave.
St. Paul 6, Minn.

FOR SERVICEMEN IN ENGLAND

The members of the Liverpool Science Fiction Society, "The Space Dive", 13a St. Vincent St., (Back of Lime Street Station), Liverpool, England, would like to welcome any American servicemen, who are stationed at Burton Wood U.S.A.A.F. Base, to our club premises any Monday night after 7 p.m.

We are not trying to make anything out of this, it's just that we feel that it is about time we English fans did something for you for a while instead of always being on the receiving end of the stick.

So come along—we would like to see you—and we will do our best to make you feel at home with the English fans. The same applies to any other Merseyside fans. We'd like to see or hear from you too.

That's all for now—thanks for sparing a few moments to read this.

DAVID S. GARDNER.

63, Island Road,
Liverpool, 19.
Lancashire, England.

(Continued on page 112)

YOUR CHOICE OF TWO GREAT BOOKS

ALIEN LAND by Willard Savoy
(Published at $3.00)

Surging power, a tensely dramatic story that rises to a searing climax, a theme which boldly attacks one of the greatest problems of today—these mark ALIEN LAND as a novel in every way out of the ordinary. It will make the name of Willard Savoy one to remember. Under Willard Savoy's sure hands, the story of Kern Roberts and his quest for wholeness moves forward with inexorable drive. Strong passions and scenes of violence mark its progress; it illuminates great wrongs and ancient hatreds. It is a book of anger and condemnation, as any work must be that deals honestly with the injustices of our world. It is also a book of compassion and hope: for Willard Savoy knows that for every man there can be some measure of fulfillment and happiness. You may regard ALIEN LAND as a fierce outcry against wrong; you may read it merely as a headlong story of shocking impact. Either way, you will find it a tremendous reading experience.

OR

THE BRIDE OF NEWGATE by John Dickson Carr
(Published at $3.00)

Dick Darwent, ex-fencing master, was waiting in a dark cell of Newgate Prison—waiting to be hanged. While Dick waited for the hangman, Lady Caroline Ross, rich, cold and beautiful, prepared a champagne breakfast to celebrate her marriage to him, a marriage which would cost her fifty pounds, and which would be ended an hour after it had begun.

But a shot through a bathroom window, where a lovely lady sat in a tub of milk—a riot in the opera, led by champion pugilists—a pistol duel at dawn—and a mysterious coachman, whose cloak was shiny with graveyard mold changed everything! As did Napoleon Bonaparte!

John Dickson Carr, a master of the detective novel, now proves himself to be a master of the historical novel in this thrilling story of London in 1815 and the gaudy characters that made up its world of fashion, and its underworld.

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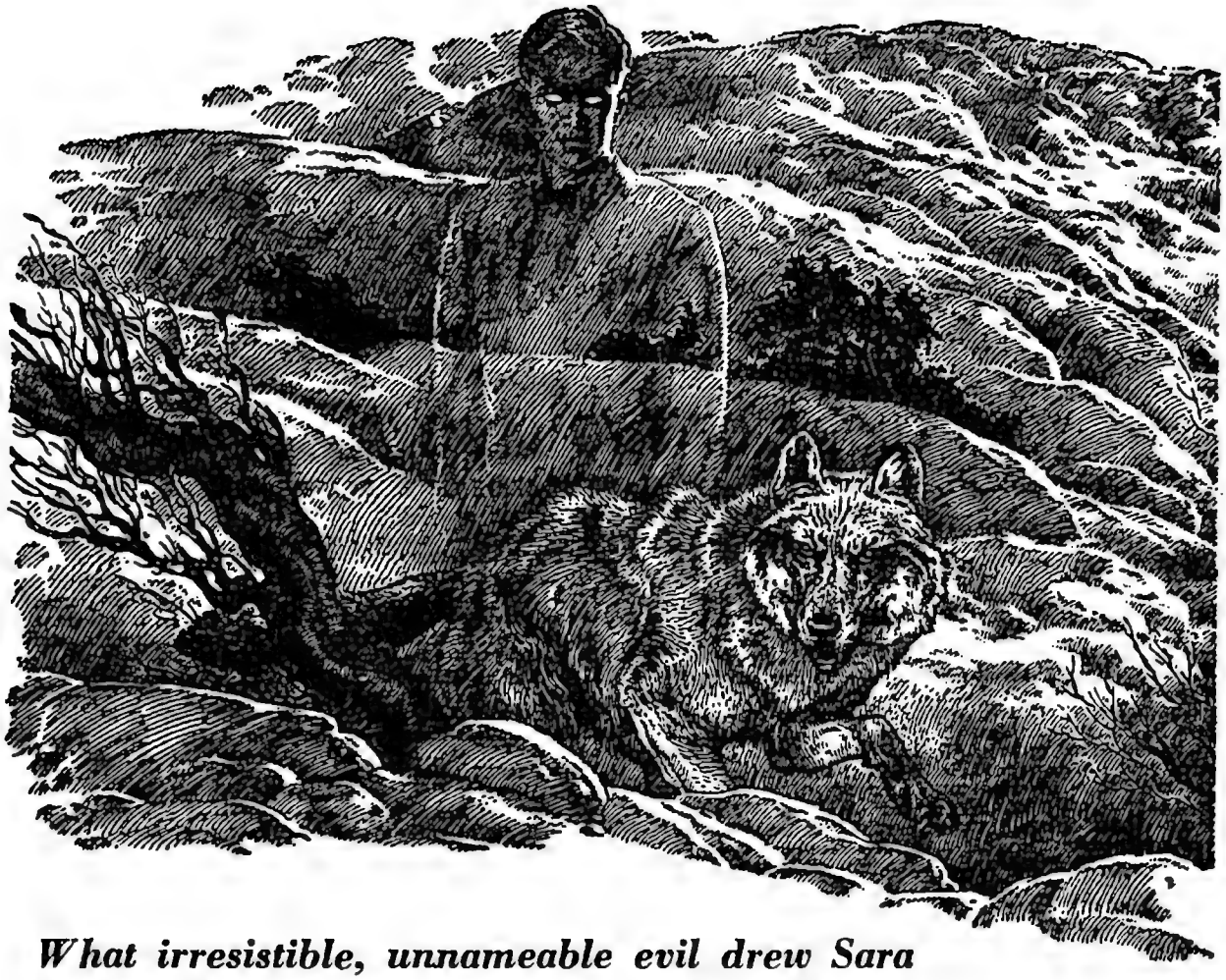
THE WHITE WOLF

By Franklin Gregory



What irresistible, unnameable evil drew Sara Camp-d'Avesnes to a strangely familiar hovel in Philadelphia's reeking slums? And what connection had her odd disappearances with the horror that shocked the Pennsylvania countryside?

IT WAS the boast of Pierre de Camp d'Avesnes that the wild fragrance of the perfume for which his name was celebrated could not be duplicated. Not in the five and one-half centuries his family had possessed the formula in their native France, nor the one hundred and fifty years since their escape to America, had the secret been lost.

Pierre used to explain about it, sitting in the overstuffed luxury of the Bankers and Manufacturers Club—his poorer eye, the one with the drooping lid, fixed wistfully on the fat cigars in the mouths of his economic-royalist auditors.

Old Henri, Comte de Saint-Pol, had started the thing. He had been on the last of the

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Men now whispered of ghouls; of the hellborn; of the bewitched undead.

Crusades with Louis IX, and later, knocking around in Zorzania only a score of years in advance of Marco Polo, had picked up the secret.

As a matter of course, the Comte de Saint-Pol, aside from hunting and making war, did nothing for himself. The manufacture was left in the hands of two dependent families, each halving the secret—and the labor. And the ladies and gentlemen of the house d'Avesnes henceforth possessed their individual odor, which became as distinctive to their line as their coat of arms.

Not a member of the club but had heard Pierre tell the story.

"We must have been a pretty stinking lot," he would say, and would blow his nose with the large white handkerchief he stored in a tail pocket of his baggy suit coat. The very thought of himself using perfume was abhorrent.

He talked a good deal about his family; their estates along the Somme; their love of the hunt; how Gervase, his great-great-grandfather, escaped the Revolution and, after a two-month buffetting in an English brig, reached Philadelphia with no other capital than the family formula. But for some reason, and in spite of the luxuriant growth of the family tree, Pierre had never penetrated further back, conversationally, than old Henri. He did tonight.

It was Halloween. It was raining. Ben McCallister had gotten up and said he supposed he'd better drop over to the Bellevue for his daughter's party. Pierre had said Sara would be there, and McAllister left. Grillot (Biddle, Baker & Grillot, Bonds) watched him leave, then turned and stood at the tall, wide, heavily draped windows, peering out into the evening traffic of Broad Street. Behind the creases of his frown you would have thought he was pondering some heavy financial matter—the City Housing Authority's $32,000,000 issue of debentures, perhaps, or the pawning of the Municipal Gas Works. As a matter of fact, he was simply watching the tracings left on the wet pavement by the tires of motor vehicles and wondering what happened to them when they disappeared. He said, suddenly, without turning his head toward the group of men sitting behind him:

"It's the night when witches walk."

"Witches don't walk, sir," grunted Dr. Hardt. "They ride. Ghosts walk."

Grillot said nothing; merely kept looking at the rain. Dr. Hardt added:

"Not that I ever saw one. But—"

The others knew what the "but" meant. The massive psychiatrist referred to his own one-time interest in the occult.

There was a silence, of voices. Manning Trent, sinking back in his leather lounge chair and pulling at his corona, squinted at Pierre. He thought he saw that gleam in Pierre's pale blue eyes which usually preceded one of his stories about his family. Yet there was something doubtful about the gleam this time; as if Pierre was giving more than ordinary thought to what he was going to say; or, more accurately, was weighing the advisability of saying it at all. Hanling, who manufactured beltings, saw the gleam, too.

He groaned, "Oh, Lord!"

He really didn't mean Pierre's stories ever bored him. It was simply his way of being funny. But his exclamation had the effect of prolonging the silence, of permitting the fleshy-faced Pierre to chew his thoughts into finer particles.

Pierre chewed. He fingered, as he always did when thoughtful, the big mole on his right cheek. He shifted his not inconsiderable bulk and he looked at Trent as if asking for some signal. He always did that. It was a little rite between the two men, attesting that their bond was somewhat closer than with the others. Pierre's eyes asked:

"Looking for an argument?"

And Trent, who always liked to hear Pierre argue about anything (indeed, every story Pierre told wound up with an argument better than the tale and Pierre never cared which side he took), nodded gently. Pierre picked at his mole.

Pierre said, "I never saw a ghost walk, either. I never saw a witch ride. But I've an ancestor...."

Grillot, whose sharp financial brains were gambling on which of two raindrops would be first to reach the window sill, turned around.

"I don't believe," Pierre said. "I've ever told you about old Hughes. He was one of the Comtes de Saint-Pol, too. But considerably before old Henri's time. My father—you remember Father, Manning—was pretty much ashamed of him. As if what somebody did a thousand years before you came along had anything to do with you."

Hanling's nose wrinkled.

"A thousand? The last time I heard of your family, it was seven hundred."

Trent said, "Let him alone, E.B."

GROOVES appeared in Pierre's wide forehead. He didn't like those interruptions.

"Well, say eight hundred, then. And I'll say now, gentlemen, it's about as far back as I can trace my people, though I imagine old Hugues had a father, the same as the rest of

us. Only . . well, I've always thought it might be the Devil.

"I mean that. There probably wasn't a crueler man ever lived. Nor more cowardly. And that goes for any of your present-day dictators. Men like Hugues always have enemies. Hugues had them by the dozen. Two of them were the Comte d'Auxi and the Comte de Beaurain-sur-Canche.

"You can read about 'em in your history books. Hugues got Auxi and Beaurain on the run and they and their gang made a beeline for the Abbey of Saint-Riquier. That's at Ponthieu, northeast a bit of Abbeville on the Somme and pretty close to the English Channel. You'll find it on any map. Anyway, Hugues chased the two counts to the abbey, attacked it and burned it." Pierre held a finger to his nose. "It was, he said slowly, "on July 28, 1131. More than three thousand men, women and children were killed."

Dr. Hardt coughed.

"Three thousand, sir? Look at what Hitler did to Warsaw and Rotterdam. Look at London!"

Pierre inclined his thick neck slightly.

"Yes, yes, of course. But there's no law now. The church hasn't any power. But it did then. At least, there were understandings. And one of them was you couldn't attack the abbey. But Hugues didn't stop there. He continued to pillage Ponthieu. The abbot got away to Abbeville and sent a messenger to the king of France. Louis le Gros got up on his high horse and started after Hugues with an army. Hugues got scared and ran off to the Pope.

"Innocent thought it over, called in a few cardinals, and finally told Hughes he wasn't sure he could save his soul. But maybe . . well, if Hugues built a new abbey well, His Holiness would see what he could do."

Hanling asked, "Did he?"

"He did. He built a bigger and better abbey and he endowed it with most of the family fortune. Cercamp, they called it. Hugues' life was saved, and he thought his soul was, too."

Dr. Hardt said, "Well, sir, wasn't it?"

Pierre replied slowly, "I don't know. But it is known that for more than four hundred years it was not at rest. Hugues de Camp-d'Avesnes, Comte de Saint-Pol, haunted that district for generation after generation. He was seen time after time, always at night, slinking among the ruins of Saint-Riquier. He was not seen as a man. He was seen as a wolf, a huge, white wolf burdened with chains. And on still, dark nights they said you could hear his bay from the forest as if he were in pain."

Grillot turned on the balls of his feet and stared out the window. It had stopped raining. He knocked his pipe against an ornamental iron ash stand. He said, gruffly, over his shoulder:

"You believe that?"

Pierre's eyes sought those of Manning Trent. It was again that secret signal of understanding, a question in a glance, silently asking:

"Well, Manning, which side shall I take?"

Trent's nod was imperceptible to the others.

Grillot said, still not turning, "I mean, damn it, in a general way. Do you believe in ghosts?"

Pierre's answer was in his most irritating tone, that which the others had learned was an invitation to debate.

"It isn't," Pierre said with casual assurance, "a question of believing, at all. It's simply a matter of accepting known historical facts."

"Trash!" exclaimed Grillot, and he turned, facing from his towering height the bulky, seated Pierre.

"Stuff and nonsense," Hanling said.

"Really, sir," said Dr. Hardt, "isn't that just a bit on the long side?"

"And how about the wolf?" Grillot demanded. "How'd anybody know it was this ancestor of yours?"

"Of course," chided Hanling. "Now, if the wolf had *looked* like Hugues. "

"As a matter of fact," Pierre said, "the eyes did."

MEANWHILE, at the McCallister ball, young David Trent sat alone, desperately handsome, marvelously at ease, slender, immaculate. His face was lean and long and it was hollow of cheek. The tanned skin was neither old nor young, but there were lines . adding, Sara thought, a touch of the dignity of experience. He wore a terse, dark mustache suggestive—and only suggestive—of the sinister; and his carelessly elegant evening dress was, unlike most of the others about him, an expression of marked personality.

That personality, so definitely present in his clothes and in his face, was still short of exact definition. There was in it a hint of other climes, almost of other ages and other worlds. And this hint of cosmopolitan quality was intensified by the features—a nose Greek and classical, hair black and Latin, eyes almost Oriental.

Once the eyes looked at Sara. She felt naked before them. Yet, half screened by narrowing eyelids, they burned with an understanding Sara never fancied could exist in any human. Uncomfortably she lowered hers.

"Who is he?" David Trent inquired in the studied drawl with which he had combated his early speech impediment. Sara could only shrug her bare white shoulders.

There were others at the McCallister party who wondered, too, as they passed his table. And even Mrs. Constance McCallister, here introducing her daughter Cecile to society, caught herself more than once glancing discreetly at the man. It would never do to let him know she did not recognize him.

An hour passed. And Sara and David danced and drank the McCallisters' champagne. Then, suddenly, for no reason apparent to her, Sara's spirit seemed to dry up. And with it dried up the spirit of this tropical garden into which the McCallister railroad gold had transformed the ballroom. The banks of misty green acacia lost their loveliness; the artificial waterfall grew less lively; the exotic fish in the pool at the base of the fall lost something of their beauty.

She noticed the strange man had left his table. She said:

"Cecile's party's awfully dull."

And Sylvia Ambler, sitting at their table, said with the crude forthrightness of the very young, "Let's scram."

Sylvia's escort, Chick Hunt, thought it a good idea. And so did Ann Curtis and Beefy Collins. And Sara said, in an odd sort of voice:

"I know just the place to have our fortunes told. Halloween too. They say he's grand."

But afterwards, holding up her green chiffon gown to step into the Trent's car, Sara wondered how she knew. She had never been there before. She was certain of that. And when she had said, "They say he's grand," she wondered what she meant by "they." She could not recall anyone having told her. And that troubled her; for usually her memory was tenacious.

She wondered, as Roger, the Trent chauffeur, stopped at a red traffic light, if it was another of those inexplicables which occasionally beset her, such a compulsion as sometimes reached out at her from God alone knew where. No, no. Not that. She must have read about him somewhere. She snatched eagerly at this solution. She must have read about him.

The car reached South Street, the Lenox Avenue of Philadelphia's Harlem. Sara leaned forward and issued a curt instruction to Roger. The car turned east.

"My *dear,*" purred Ann. "You certainly seem to know your way down here."

Sara's full red lips set.

Chick Hunt said, "Say, isn't this where those arsenic murderers were?"

Sylvia shivered deliciously.

"Somewhere in here," Beefy volunteered. "Farther east, I think."

Passage was slow. Sidewalks were crowded; the street was filled with oddly assorted traffic; late hucksters' wagons, trucks, long green trolley cars.

The street was still wet after the rain. And it was still dirty with the litter of the day. Cans of ashes and rubbish spilled over at the curbs. It was a Philadelphia street.

Sylvia thought, What a godawful funny place! Funny idea for Sara. .

Ann thought, She's so cold, so aloof, never really one for a lark like this!

Big, broad-shouldered David Trent frowned. Didn't like the neighborhood. He pressed Sara's smooth, cool hand.

There were smells in this street you found nowhere else. Those rose from the seething humanity, from the refuse, from the hills of vegetables and fruits and chickens and rabbits in front of the lighted windows of the shops, from exhaust pipes and gutters.

There were noises: the shrill cries of cursing urchins, the yaps of the vendors, the *clunk-clunk* of a trolley car's flat wheel, the deafening squawk of an auto horn, jaded laughter.

The buildings were old, rickety Colonial structures in the best and worst Philadelphia tradition: red brick, narrow of front, with slate roofs sloping toward the street.

A traffic tie-up stopped them in front of a herbalist's window, first of a string of similar shops along Voodoo Row. They could see odd, repulsive merchandise in the window: a bottled rattlesnake, a skull, dead bats and stuffed owls, and, in a yellowing liquid in a jar, what appeared to be a human fetus.

These were the shops that pandered to the ignorant, the superstitious, the wretched; they were the shops where were sold "graveyard dirt" and "compelling incense" and "chasing-away goods." Behind one of the windows moved the long-gowned shadowy figure of the witch doctor.

"Such a palpable fraud!" Sara exclaimed, as the limousine began to move. And Sylvia, her eyes narrow, asked:

"But how do *you* know?"

Sara stared at the scene, and she gave Roger directions. The limousine swung into Ninth Street.

"Slow, Roger."

The car slowed, and Sara, her face pressed to the window, looked out. She was puzzled. The street was familiar! Could she, she wondered, have seen this street with such clarity and in such detail by only reading about it? It did not seem sane. But what else could it be? Never, combing even her childhood, could

she recollect having been anywhere near it.

Here the quaint narrow houses had small white stone steps with rails of wrought iron on either hand. They had solid doors set in arched white frames. A single gas lamp on an iron standard midway to the next intersection lit the brick-paved street. And when the limousine rolled to a stop, it was to the door behind that lamp that Sara unerringly led the rest.

The maid said, "You wanna see the doctor?"

Chick Hunt said airily, "That was the general idea."

THE maid led them into a cold, bare hallway. Her slippers scuffing, she beckoned them along the passage until they reached a point midway through the house. She opened a door and guided them into a large, windowless room. And then she left them.

The room was as naked as the hall. There were no chairs, no tables. No carpet covered the wide planks. There was light, but its source was obscured and it seemed unreal. As they entered, a gaunt gray cat—either so old or so serene as to be oblivious to their presence—stood up, stretched, and paced imperially out of the room through a far door that stood half open.

Through that door the sounds of words lifted.

"Well, what do they want?"

The question was imperative. The tone was cold. Sara thought there was an overtone faintly familiar of something—the time, perhaps, when she heard the gasping rattle of death at the bedside of an aunt.

There was a mumble from the maid. Ann's flesh crept. Then, without warning, the doctor appeared at the door. And Sara gave a little cry.

It couldn't be, she thought. It *couldn't* be! Yet here were the same face and the same eyes of the man who, only an hour before, drew so many questioning glances at the McCallister ball. He advanced a few paces, teetering with each step as if either he were slightly drunk or his shoes—of such fine-grained leather they might have been tanned from human hide—pinched his feet. And yet, despite this ambulatory uncertainty, he seemed at ease, his hands shoved into the pockets of his gray double-breasted suit coat.

He stared blandly at his intruders. He inspected them, one by one. Finally, his eyes, from their small sockets, rested upon Sara's white face. Yes, they were the same eyes that in the ballroom had denuded her soul; there could be no other pair seeming, as these, to hold the wisdom of all sin.

Yet Sara's companions did not recognize him.

Beefy said feebly, "Look here—"

But the man was attracted only to Sara. She wondered why. Sylvia's fresh face was prettier; Ann's more inviting. Her own; the cheek bones were too high, the face too long, her mouth too big, her nose too prominently French, and her complexion—except for the garnet red of her lips—much too pale.

At length, the man demanded of the room at large, "Why do you come here?"

Chick Hunt said, "Why the idea was. . . We wanted our fortunes told."

The lean face clouded. It turned toward Hunt.

"You think I use my wisdom to tell fortunes?"

Sara detected a note of derision. Hunt looked at David Trent. Trent glanced questioningly at Sara. Lamely, she said:

"I thought. . . ."

"I do not tell fortunes," the man said. The tone was final. But when he added, "I am a healer, I cure souls and I cure bodies, I cure them with faith," Sara knew he lied. And somehow she felt the lie was directed more at the ears of the others than at hers.

Chick reached into his pockets, drew out a roll of bills.

"If it's only a matter of money," he began.

He never finished. With tottering yet lightning movement, the man was before Hunt.

"Son—" And his tone was now cold contempt. "You are indeed naïve if you believe that money buys all things."

Chick—the hot-headed Chick Hunt of Penn's Varsity—shook with anger. His hands clenched.

"Why, damn you!" he snarled. And before David could check his arm, he'd struck. But the man was not there. He was back in the center of the room, teetering in those queer, uncomfortable shoes. And Sara saw something else; he had lost his composure. At the blow? He had not been struck. At what Chick had said?

Chick struggled to free himself from David.

"Now here," Beefy pleaded. "Let's scram. It's his place. Somebody'll call the cops and we'll all be in a jam."

David and Beefy led Hunt toward the door. The girls followed. But Sara found no will to leave. She moved, yet muscular progress seemed impeded by a wall of unfelt force. That was why she was last to reach the corridor, the last to reach the outer door. It was why, standing doubtfully at the door, she felt the tall lean man immediately behind her, his awful eyes upon her. She felt a touch, ice cold, upon her wrist. When she glanced down, she saw his hand.

PIERRE DE CAMP D'AVESNES chuckled with satisfaction as he boarded the last train in the Reading's Market Street sheds. He still saw Hardt's frown; Grillot's red face and disbelieving eyes; and he still heard Hanling's irritated snort of contempt which he knew was only a cover for his defeat.

He could have filled the bill for Guy de Maupassant's Joseph de Bardon. For he had wit without much depth, a general knowledge without real learning, and quick perception without serious penetration. These three qualities he had exhibited with considerable shrewdness that night, to the discomfort of some of the others.

Oh, he had led up to the subject casually enough. The argument about the spirit world had reached the point where Grillot was knocking holes in the various planes that, Manning Trent suggested, lie beyond this life. Pierre extracted a crumpled envelope from his pocket and, pencil in hand, drew upon it. He did it quite obviously but the effect was that of a cat watching a mouse hole, and finally Mouse Hanling stuck his head out.

"What's that?" he demanded, leaning forward.

"This?" Pierre's round fleshy face attained such dignity as it could. "It's a one-dimensional world."

"All I see's a straight line. Hanling snorted.

The others looked too.

"That," said Pierre, "is because you lack imagination."

"You wouldn't mean, inquired Trent, "that it's one of the three dimensions humans perceive?"

"Exactly," said Pierre. "Length."

"Trash!" exploded Grillot. "That's as abstract as a four-dimensional world. You can't have one human dimension without the other two."

Pierre inclined his thick neck.

"Certainly. That's why I say Hanling has no imagination. But, see here. I'll put a man down here—a one-dimensional man. Let's call him X. His knowledge, his power, are limited to this one dimension, this straight line. It's his only world and it runs in both directions to infinity. He can travel upon it, forward or backward.

"Now, let's say he's traveling forward. He meets with a two-dimension rock-slide. It had length, but it also has height. How'll he surmount this rock slide so he can continue his journey?"

Hanling pursed his lips.

"Go around?"

"There's nothing to go around," said Pierre.

"Well, dammit, let him climb over, then."

Pierre's smile revealed his irregular teeth.

"Impossible. You forget, he's a one-dimensional creature and hasn't the power to leave his one-dimensional world, which he'd have to do if he climbed over. The result is, you have to accept this fact: this obstacle of two dimensions is, to him, a mystery. It is a fence between his own world and some other world he can't penetrate and can but dimly comprehend."

Grillot frowned. He grunted:

"I see *that*. It's sense."

Pierre looked at Trent, whose eyes showed he thought he knew what was coming. Pierre said:

"So let's follow up and see where we get. We'll place a two-dimensional creature in this one-dimensional world. We'll call him Y. He travels along the line, comes to the two-dimensional rock-slide and *he* climbs over. Now if you were in X's shoes, wouldn't that appear to be a miracle?"

Hanling conceded grudgingly he "guessed that was so."

"Of course, said Pierre. "So, in the eyes of X, Y becomes a god. And not only can god Y climb over the object, he can lift the rocks into the air directly above the one-dimensional world. He can carry them over X's head and replace them on the other side of him, much to X's concern. He can turn the rocks upside down."

"Very well," said Hanling, "where's all that get us?"

"It gets us," continued Pierre, "to the two-dimensional world in which Y himself lives and where he is not a god at all. His world had length *and* height. He can rise straight up and he can dig straight down, besides traveling forward or backward. But he knows nothing of the world to the right or to the left. For him, that world has no existence.

"But one day he comes to an object that has three dimensions. It has the two qualities of his own world, length and height, but it also has breadth. He can still climb over as before, but he cannot go around. To do that he would have to step out of his own world. So, if you or I, living in a three-dimensional world, were to come along and pass around the object, Y himself would be confronted with a miracle."

"All right, said Hanling impatiently. "But I still don't see—"

"Just this," interrupted Pierre. "Why isn't it possible for us, living in our three-dimensional world, to find ourselves facing the same problem a miracle we might call the fourth dimension?"

"You mean—"

Pierre persisted. "I ask, what would be so incedible about this room we're sitting in, sealed tight, windows locked, doors bolted, having that chair you're sitting in, Hanling, removed from it along the fourth dimension? Yes, and you along with it, too!"

THE train rolled to a stop at the Oak Lane station. There was a momentary pause for the discharge of passengers; then, smoothly, the train rolled out. Now Pierre's face was sober. The left eyelid drooped a bit more. He stared out into the night, seeing nothing. Was there, he wondered, just a grain of truth in the argument he'd used to try to convince the others?

He'd never given much thought to things like that. The world, in which he'd always had a pretty good time, was quite an objective thing to him. And he'd never bothered his head a great deal about what might lie on the other side. He heard Hanling again:

"All supposition!"

He heard himself replying. "Certainly. But the three dimensions are only a *human* conception. Do you think they're necessarily the only combination?"

Now, why in the devil did he think of that?

Justin Hardt had coughed importantly and inclined his houndlike head and had finally spoken with that bombastic air of last-word authority for which, even more than his medical knowledge, he was celebrated.

"Don't, sir," he said, with a direct look at Hanling, "let the man befuddle you with such tish-tosh. I, who have made a study of the subject and believe nothing, can give you a much better argument. And," turning to Pierre, "a much briefer one. I merely ask, what makes wood burn up into smoke and makes the smoke disappear?"

There was general laughter. Until Grillot broke in abruptly with dead seriousness:

"I don't know. A man gets to thinking about things sometimes and he goes whacky. I get to thinking about figures. They're simple little things. I've dealt with 'em all my life. There are only ten of them and after that there are just the same figures over and over again in combinations. But—well, I get to thinking sometimes that there's some mystery about 'em. Take a bond issue, just for example. One little abstract fraction of one per cent can make a whale of a lot of difference.

"I'll worry stiff sometimes figuring what premium I ought to offer and what interest rate I'll accept on an issue of upstate municipal debentures. The wrong figure will spell the difference between profit and loss. And if there's enough in it, it might spell ruin. And again, if the interest I win is a bit high it'll mean—in terms of actual, physical sweat—that some poor fish will have to swing the pick a bit harder to pay the tax that meets the terms."

Pierre nodded eagerly.

"I know what you mean. It's the same with the chemistry of perfumes. You add two odors and you'll get a third entirely different from either of them. That's magic."

"It's science, sir, and there's no magic to it," growled Hardt.

Pierre shrugged.

"Have it your own way. But some people believe that this world and other worlds are in tune with each other on certain vibratory thought waves. They reach that conclusion through analogy, after studying the vibratory qualities of common objects about us. They purport to see magic everywhere—and for proof they say that if you change the rate or the mode or the degree of the vibrations of any given object, you change the object itself."

He looked straight into Hardt's face. And Hardt taunted:

"Like my wood and smoke, sir?"

"Yes, and like ice turning to water and then to steam. Or like a cat's inability to see any color save gray, while we, boasting better perception, have our spectrum but can't see the diversity of color that lies beyond."

"But neither of you," interposed Trent, "says exactly what you mean. You're trying to prove or disprove something that's beyond your comprehension. But you have only human words to work with. As a newspaper man, I know how damnably weak words are! I'll publish an editorial. Three hundred thousand readers see it. Each one gets a slightly different impression from the other and all of them a somewhat different idea than I tried to put across. For each reader qualifies that editorial in the light of his own experience, knowledge, or mood at the time.

"Hell, I'm not being exact myself. What I'm trying to say is, I believe with you and your figures, Grillot, that there's a magic in words, too. Ever notice how a word lingers on the rim of your consciousness long after it's been spoken?"

"Oh, yes; yes, of course."

"Of course. Same tone, same inflection. It'll get buried under a pile of other words, but a long time later some faint suggestion will draw it up again. Or perhaps, by that time, only a haunting memory of it, not quite identified for what it is, will strive toward the surface."

Dr. Hardt fingered the black ribbon of his pince-nez.

"And where does that get us, sir?"

"Just this. If a word, frail and weak, as I

said, and a human invention in the first place and seldom accurate, will survive, like that, why can't personality?"

Dr. Hardt's nose wrinkled.

"A very poor argument, sir. In the first place, if you were acquainted with psychology at all, you would realize that there's a definite physiological reason both for the retention and revival of the memory image, the word.

The word is apprehended, registered and fixed, the strength of the impression depending upon attention and the impressionability of the cortical neurones. It is retained in the cerebral neurones. It is returned to the surface consciousness when the brain cells are stimulated by a new nerve impulse. And that is all there is to it, sir."

Trent had been sitting back, the tips of his fingers against each other, a smile of amusement growing on his lean face.

"Quite all, Doctor?" he asked.

"Quite."

"And you are prepared to state precisely the magic that makes those neurones function as they do?"

Dr. Hardt merely stared at him.

On the train, now, Pierre considered the conversation item by item. Nothing to worry about, he thought; just a lot of crackpot talk. He tried to recapture the joviality with which he had got aboard. He glanced behind him to see if there was anyone in the coach he knew. He looked out the window. The lights of Jenkintown, Glenside, Willow Grove arrived, hesitated beside the train, and then moved backward swiftly.

H'mm. He'd always been such a damned skeptic, too.

At Hatboro, Heinrich was waiting with the station wagon.

He was feeling more himself twenty minutes later when the station wagon rolled into the winding lane which, before the Revolution, was the Old Post Road and which now led through groves of great oaks to the house. He entered by the long hall, and noticing a light to the left, in the library, went in.

Sara was sitting on a turtle stool, her knees drawn up, her long shapely hands clasping her ankles. She was staring moodily into the dying embers of the fire.

He said cheerily, "Hello, pet."

Sara did not reply.

THE next morning Sara did not come down for breakfast. Pierre ate alone, sitting at the chaste maple table across from the massive fireplace. In the old days, when Fountain Head was a tavern, the dining room had been the kitchen and the fireplace had a reason for existence. You could walk without stooping into that fireplace, its back wall of firebrick blackened by the smoke of generations. You could sit down on either side of the colossal spit on little stone seats to toast your toes. It was little changed. The old iron crane, supporting the fat iron pot, still swung to one side; the smoke-worn bellows, the selection of pokers, the tongs, were still in place. Pierre kept the smoke gate half open for ventilation.

But the rest of the room was not at all what it had been, even in Pierre's childhood. Angelica had seen to that. They hadn't been back from their honeymoon a month when her nervous fingers were busy "rearranging," as she called it. Actually, it amounted to a domestic hurricane. All the old old solid furniture was discarded; there were days Angelica spent combing old attics and basements and antique shops for spindly things she described as "pieces." And finally, when Pierre returned one night, she was able to display proudly an "authentic restoration."

Never since had Pierre been exactly comfortable in the room, despite the fact that the fireplace had escaped the storm. But it had not interfered with his appetite. He had left things exactly as they were, even after Angelica went away.

Angelica. . .

Queer little thing, he thought; always fluttering about like a hummingbird. Always doing, always changing. He had picked up a copy of the Social Register once and, thumbing the pages idly, had come across his name along with the Cadwaladers and the Chews and the Clothiers and the Cromwells, the Curtins and the Curtises—not far behind the Biddles, not far ahead of the Drexels.

The register read: *Camp-d'Avesnes, Pierre de. Fountain Head. Old Trenton Road. Mrs. Absent.*

There had never been a divorce.

Odd, he considered, that he had never missed her very much.

Heinrich's plump wife, Freda, appeared through the pantry door beside the fireplace. She moved with heavy, purposeful steps to the table. Pierre had never seen her change her stolid German expression. He had never heard her change her abrupt formula:

"The fruit I serve." A little later, upon her re-entrance, "The scrapple I serve."

The tone was always the same—mournful.

Pierre ate with relish. There was no trouble in his mind that food could not cure. For he was jovial by nature. Minor depressions leveled off more easily with him than with others. And even the moods of Sara, the child Angelica left behind sixteen years ago, bounced from him like a rubber ball.

She was in one of those states now, or she would have been down to breakfast. He'd had a taste of it when he found her by the fire last night. H'm-m. She'd snap out of it.

He glanced toward the large window with its little square panes set deeply into the two feet of stone wall, starting almost at the floor and ending almost at the ceiling. It framed a landscape of autumnal glory.

In the foreground the oaks blazed crimson. Between their branches wide ribbons of morning sunlight slanted, printing great blocks of gold upon the lane. The lane, once a segment of the old Trenton Post Road, disappeared through the wood, coming up short half a mile beyond on the other side of Mt. Neshaminy.

Through the trees and to the left Pierre could see the foot of the hill, which was all that it was in spite of its pretentious title. If you climbed its grassy slopes and stood at the summit and looked south and west, and if it was a clear day and you used a little imagination plus a pair of binoculars, you could see Valley Forge. If you turned north you could see the gloomy Hexenkopf. And if you made a quarter turn toward the east, you could see the low-lying hills where Washington crossed the Delaware to strike at the Hessians.

Pierre looked at the lane, at the oaks, at the carpet of jeweled leaves upon the ground. It must be hell, he thought, to be blind.

He drank his coffee meditatively. Queer girl, Sara. Hope she marries well. Been seeing quite a bit of young Trent lately. H'm-m. He liked that. Manning and he got on so well. They've even torn down the fences between their adjoining grounds.

Let's see. She's been out two years now. He'd done it himself, though there was a horde of bothersome aunts who wanted a finger in it. He was proud of his lone achievement. They'd stayed in town that winter with a suite at the Warrick. The introduction had been at a tea dance after the Army-Navy game. Very nice, people were. Everybody had made it a point to stop in after the game. Later there had been a formal dinner at the Bellevue on her birthday.

Well, where was she now? Martyring herself with the little concentrations of the Junior League; doing the things expected of her and hating herself for it.

He drained his cup. She ought to get married. Damned if he wouldn't marry her himself if he were twenty years younger and she wasn't his daughter.

The pantry door opened. Freda poked out her stolid face.

"Heinrich the car has ready," she announced.

Pierre pushed back his chair and got up.

UPSTAIRS in her room, on the other side of the house, Sara sat at her vanity. She sat motionless, her hands in her lap, a scarlet negligee draped about her rounded white shoulders, her long black hair with its blue tints cascading down her back. The reflection in her mirror revealed soft curves half concealed by her lacy slip.

David had kissed her that night. And that night returned to her, each detail sharply delineated upon her memory: the passionate warmth of August, the sough of the wistful breeze through the wood, the prodigal aromas rising, an invisible mist, from field and garden. She had remained a long, long time in his arms. She had been happy. But now she was uncertain, bewildered. The meaningless dissatisfactions and the felt but undeciphered yearnings of her lonely childhood seemed to be returning.

What in the devil was it that she wanted?

She must have inherited very much from Pierre. She possessed his sensitive nature. But where he, like a connoisseur, tasted life casually in little pieces—his eyes drinking in the beauty of a landscape; his ears, the loveliness of music; his nostrils, the delicate perfumes of flowers and their essence—she, conscious of the abundance of life, absorbed the whole of it at once through all her senses.

Like Pierre, she leaned to the hours after dark. But where Pierre liked them for the companionship they brought, the theater, the city lights, the new interests arising from the intercourse of man relaxed, she liked them in all their quiet nakedness.

A chill October night with the wind sweeping vagabond clouds across the stars; the depth of oak wood, its mystery deepening the farther she penetrated into it; a moonlit winter's walk along the banks of the Neshaminy, its waters gurgling and splashing over rocks; an early summer night when, sitting rigidly on the long, wide porch, she gazed out into the torrential rains.

Night gave her a measure of peace; day left her without ease.

Yet, if these differences between father and daughter were founded on similarities, there were more basic differences. Pierre was kind. She, fundamentally, was cruel. There was the time when, in childish passion, she had beaten a puppy mercilessly with her fists. And when the puppy cringed, she felt glad and beat it all the harder. Punished, she felt not the least sorry. She learned to control herself in time. Custom bade she must. But ever since, each time she saw a dog, she felt she'd met an enemy.

"But why don't you like dogs?" Ann asked once.

"Don't know. I can't stand them. Give me the creeps."

"Afraid of them?"

"Perhaps."

She reserved another feeling for horses—contempt.

"Curious," Manning Trent said to Pierre one day when they were cantering along a saddle trail, "that Sara doesn't ride. You like it so well. And so'd her mother. She's got such a damned good build for it, too."

"Better than I have." Pierre grinned, and touched his paunch. "Never could get her to look at a horse. Says her own legs are good enough for her."

"Ha. They're good legs, all right," Trent admitted. "But every man jack of you, and woman, too, was horsy."

"I know."

Pierre did not worry about it. He was tolerant to the point of indifference when it came to interfering with the likes and dislikes of others.

Sara's contempt for horses deepened to hatred for cattle and sheep and domestic livestock in general. There was the occasion when, visiting a neighboring farm, she'd inadvertently come upon the butchering of a pig. She didn't turn away as most girls would. Instead, she stood and watched, experiencing a sadistic satisfaction as the animal, blood geysering from a vein, legs beating frantically, squealed in hysterical agony and died.

She accepted cats and placed no faith in them. There was always one about. She knew it for what it was—treacherous, selfish, vicious. She never stroked it; but if it leaped into her bed at night, she permitted it to stay—kneading the pillow, ramming its head against hers in a false display of affection, singing its guttural, monotonous song. It was wild, and she felt cousin to it.

But if the cat were cousin, other wild creatures—more fierce, more cruel—were blood sisters. How eagerly, as a girl, she had watched the lions and tigers at Fairmont Park snatch at their large chunks of raw meat.

Mostly, however, on those visits to the zoo, she had spent time on end in the Reptile House. And there, fascinated, she would stand staring at the slim black cord of cobra as it slithered among its rocks or, its head rising like a rocket from its coil, spitting its venomous white poison at the glass that separated watcher and watched.

She did not think of these things now. Almost beyond consciousness, she heard the station wagon rattling out of the yard and along the lane in the direction of the highway, carrying her father. The sound was lost in the picture of the previous night.

Why were those adolescent longings, buried so long in her new love, re-emerging?

Why should an immaculately attired, slender, lean-faced man with a trick mustache—a man who teetered precariously in his shoes even as he assumed an urbane air, a man for whom she even felt repulsion—appear to be the spring which released them?

What unearthly force could have drawn her to that house—that house which, objective honesty compelled her to admit, had never before entered her experience?

Her left wrist burned where he had touched her. The fingers of her right hand caressed the spot. When she withdrew them, she looked at her wrist—and then, eyes widening, stared. There was a mark on her white flesh; a tiny crescent, seemingly tattooed, seemingly indelible.

Chapter Two

DAVID said, with that slow precision that sometimes made his listeners impatient, "But where'd you get the idea the man told fortunes?"

Sara, utterly miserable, said, "I don't want to talk about it."

David's big, powerful right hand reached for the lighter on the dashboard and held it to the cigarette drooping from his mouth. More to himself than to her he said:

"Good thing we got out of that mess. 'Specially for Chick's sake. If anyone had called the cops, Chick would have been tossed off the team. It was after hours, anyhow, and we need him for Navy."

"You talk like a rah-rah boy," Sara replied. "You sound as if football were more important than going to jail. What do you care about football and Penn? You never played. You never went there."

She bit her lip. She knew, instantly, she'd hurt David. She knew as well as he that he'd never been able to play football and, for the same reason, had never gone to college. David, on his part, lapsed into diplomatic silence.

They had had these quarrels before. Always, before, Sara had been contrite; had anticipated making up. She knew she was usually wrong, that she always wound up by saying something nasty. Now, she found with growing wonder, she didn't care. .

They were driving back from a farm near Easton where David had attended an auction of Ayrshires. Sara was still wondering why she'd gone along; was beginning seriously to

question whether she wanted a farmer, even a gentleman farmer, for a husband.

They were winding along a section of the old Canal Road above New Hope, paralleling the new broken-down barge canal whose course, intercepted every few miles by rusty locks, lay between them and the Delaware. Save for the hard surface and an occasional red or green gasoline pump, the road was virtually unchanged from the days of the French and Indian Wars. Here were taverns, red-roofed stone barns, stone houses that were old when the Revolution began. Here were covered bridges of a later period.

Up on the hillsides to the west, sumac spilled its crimson paint. In the gullies the haze of late day gathered along the runs. Out of that blanket of deepening mists great swamp maples raised their scarlet crowns. In the foreground the solid topaz of a poplar stood aloof.

The haze clung, too, to the river on the east. It clung in little patches where the white hunger rocks jutted out of the shallow waters. Beyond the river the wooded Jersey hills burned in yellow and red and fading green.

David, glancing at Sara, asked:

"Where did you get the wrist watch?"

"In Jenkintown this morning. Shopping."

"Thought," said David slowly, "you didn't like wrist watches?"

Sara was evasive.

"Oh, I guess they're nice."

David was puzzled. He revealed his wonder in the creases about his pale gray eyes and along his wide forehead. He remembered, just before last Christmas, saying something to the effect that Sara never wore a watch. He didn't say so, of course, but he was thinking a watch would make a nice gift. But she'd told him then she didn't like them. Indeed, she liked nothing that bound her—belts, straps, garters, girdles. And, thank her stars, she had a figure that could do without them.

David shrugged, lounged back into the seat, giving the road his attention. He was a big fellow. When he was a child he'd been afflicted with a spinal ailment. People, even Manning, thought he would be a permanent cripple. But David, moodily watching other youngsters at play, possessed a patient courage. There were good doctors. And David faithfully followed their instructions. There were braces. There were little exercises; then there were exercises that called for more exertion. It was slow work. It took the years of his childhood and the years of his youth. It took unending patience.

He couldn't go to school. His lessons came from tutors. He couldn't go to college, but he read voraciously, systematically. In the end, violent exercise was forbidden. But he became a slow, sure swimmer; a slow, well-balanced skater. He found that walking satisfied, and so he hunted—not that he loved to kill, but because a gun slung under his left arm was a comfortable thing and balanced one of the two remaining marks of his early affliction: the sideward, downward pull of his handsome head which compelled his broad right shoulder to slope. People did not notice that at first. What usually impressed them instantly was the hard solid nature of his body and his thick unruly hair which, although he was but twenty-six, was now cream white.

Sara, again feeling the burn beneath her wrist watch, was relieved that David did not pursue the subject. She knew he would bring it up again when she least expected it; just as again he had referred to the man on Ninth Street. Tenacity in his search for explanations was characteristic of him.

Her wrist throbbed. A dozen times in the privacy of her tiny room she had examined that tiny crescent. How did he place it there? Why? Was it branded by a wisp of hot wire he might have held? Or had he managed somehow to paint a drop of acid on the flesh? She knew only that the pain served constantly to remind her of him and of his eyes, which attracted even as they repelled.

Sara's lower lip trembled. Emotions damned up for months in the reservoir of her self-restraint spilled over. She sobbed and her body shook with the sobs. But there were still no tears when David, freeing a hand from the wheel, pulled her gently to him.

She was quiet at dinner that night. She was quiet as she and Pierre sat in the library.

Once the public room of the Fountain Head, the library, too, had for its central fixture a fireplace—but one that boasted ivory-painted elegance. Its narrow, classically carved mantel and fireboard were supported by slender fluted columns, each well worn midway from the base where travelers, lounging in chairs, had parked their feet in warm and solid comfort. Some of those feet, tradition said, were shod in the boots of Washington and Knox and Hamilton and Sullivan when, on cold winter nights, they mapped their campaign against Cornwallis.

Pierre, pretending to read the *Bulletin*, a considerably less scandalous newspaper than the *Herald* which Manning Trent published each and every morning, peered over the masthead at Sara, sitting on a spindly love seat, the book on her lap open to a page she wasn't reading.

Pierre would have remarked how pale she looked; remembered, just in time, that she was always pale, yet the suggestion was in her face. It lay in the deepening shadows under her eyes; in the very restlessness of her body; in her attitude of listening for some far-off sound.

She had anticipated any questions about the watch by showing it to Pierre at dinner.

"Very pretty," he'd said. "I always thought—"

He didn't finish what he'd begun. Sara knew he wouldn't. Always considerate, he continued, instead: "—that a watch would look lovely on you, pet."

He had noticed that it was very plain; white gold without ornament or stone; just such a watch as a girl who had never liked jewelry would select. But—where in damnation did she get *that* idea?

Her silence beginning to wear on him, he put his paper aside.

"Book any good?"

She shrugged, her rising shoulders sending radiant ripples down along the soft clinging velvet of her blouse.

"The usual thing," she said with assumed cheerfulness. "Boy meets girl. . ."

She started to recite the plot, hoping to throw off the weight that was hourly becoming more burdensome. Pierre pretended to listen. Actually, he was proudly inspecting her inch by inch from the trim points of her patent-leather pumps to the hem of her pleated skirt; to the allure of her white, slender throat; to her black hair done primly back, revealing ears that were the shapeliest feature of her head.

Suddenly she ended her recital. She closed the book, replaced it on an end table, got up. She moved to the French doors which opened upon the veranda running half the length of the house. Beyond, the lawn swept down toward the Neshaminy. The shadows of trees lay on the lawn, relieved by wide and ragged patches of golden moonlight. Where the lawn ended the gold was transmuted to silver as the fast-running waters of the creek caught and held the light, cast it away and took it back again. In the field beyond the creek corn stood in shocks, casting triangular shadows upon the black earth.

"I think I'll go for a walk," Sara said.

IT WAS fifteen minutes past three o'clock the next afternoon when a cab drove up to Eighth and South Streets. A young woman, chic in a silver-fox jacket that reached just short of her hips, stepped out. She handed the driver a bill and walked away with long, swaying strides.

She walked west on South Street, knowing full well how the ragtag and bobtail of that ragtag street were staring at her.

At Ninth Street she turned. A moment later she rang a bell. Almost instantly the door opened.

A man with a lean, handsome face and a small mustache appeared.

"I thought you would return," he said.

He guided her along the passage to the rear of the house and into a small chamber which, she found, had need of only the most meager furnishings. His personality filled every crack and crevice and corner.

He seated her, and then seemed to forget.

He started working over some papers. Sara had no idea what they were. But his preoccupation was total.

She studied his face. She noted again the chiseled lines that somehow had an eternal look: the length in the thick black brows; thick hair that might have been touseled by all the winds of the world. She started as she remembered a portrait in a book Pierre had at home—Francis Barrett's engraving of the demon Ashtaroth.

She was extremely conscious, though they were lowered, of his eyes. She was glad that they did not look at her.

She could not tell how long she sat there, nor when it was that she began to feel a change within herself. The pull and tug of self-questioning still went on. But now a new growth seemed to manifest itself. It was as if a tentacle reached out toward her from somewhere in the room—a tentacle that was as immaterial and yet as actual as a current of electricity. Watching the man at the desk, she became positive that the current flowed from him.

The current was switched off.

Perhaps fifteen minutes passed, in which she sat relaxed—and receptive. And then again the flow of that force began, sweeping into her with even greater strength. But this time it brought with it something else: a fragment of knowledge, as if the current were lighting a small incandescent lamp from the ray of which she could search (but only a little way) into herself. The weak beam turned first in one psychical direction and then another, hesitating and then moving on; revealing to Sara parts of herself that, formerly, she vaguely had perceived but never understood.

The light swept the shadows from the old longings and exposed those longings in clearer outlines; yet the outlines, while giving promise of greater limning, were still so incomplete as to create tantalizing interest. And the promise, too, was of such delights, such

ecstasies as Sara had never dared to imagine.

The thought occurred to her that, for these, the price must be great. Then, just as the light seemed burning brighter, the man at the table stood up. He said:

"I think that will be all—today."

Sara stood up. She stood uncertainly.

"Who are you?" she asked.

He answered, "You would not believe me if I told you."

A moment later she was walking in the street, on her way home.

That night Pierre noticed that she was more nervous than ever. She toyed with the silver at dinner, stared at her plate, ate little. He said gently:

"You don't seem to have much appetite, dear."

"Well enough," Sara said curtly.

He remained silent, then, for a little. But at length his concern overcame his natural tolerance.

"I think," he said, "a tonic would do wonders for you. How's a trip to Europe sound? Portugal? Spain? Take the Clipper to Lisbon? Better yet, South America."

She said nothing. He began to expand.

"I've some business I could do in Buenos Aires."

Sara said shortly, "I don't want to go anywhere."

And she got up and left the table. But when she reached her room, she collapsed on her bed. She did want to go somewhere; she did want to get away. What contrariness forced her to answer Pierre as she did?

Emotion shook her. But she did not cry. Never in her life had she wept. She sat upon the edge of the bed; she could see her reflection in the long mirror on the wall. She would go down and tell Pierre she wanted the trip—and she would add that it was awfully thoughtful of him. But she didn't.

Pierre, sitting below, stirred his coffee thoughtfully.

"Damn the girl!"

Anybody could see she needed a change. But Pierre, who thrived on debating questions that didn't mean a thing, shrank from argument with Sara about anything that mattered. He realized later that it might have been the one time in his life when he should have forced his will on hers.

* * *

Another day; again Sara sat stiffly in the room where the gaunt gray cat preened herself and the lean-faced man busied himself with the innumerable papers at his table.

Again, as before, there was a period of absorption. Sara relaxed, and she received. Under the brightening ray those clouded hungers focused into sharper relief. From vague values they took on some semblance of positive appetite. But it was still only a semblance, still unrecognized. She knew only that she was stumbling down some spiritual or psychical lane, serving a novitiate for an order the purpose of which escaped her.

Again, during a moment when the current withdrew, Sara questioned, "Who are you?"

And again the man gave the same answer.

"I think I would believe you," Sara said.

The man smiled thinly.

"If I said the name, all this"—and the gesture of a graceful hand embraced the room—"would melt away. You, too, will find that out some day. We explain nothing. We admit nothing. That is confession." Slyly, he added, "And if confession is good for the soul, it also closes the world we wish to enter."

"You," Sara asked, "have entered?"

The man threw back his head and laughed.

"One enters his own home," he said. "You would enter through surrender."

She thought about that. Then:

"If I surrender?"

"You would not know this world."

"But the other. What would it be like?"

"That," he replied, "is what you are learning."

There were other visitors that afternoon. When the first—a fat greasy-handed Polish woman—entered the room, the period of receptivity ended.

The woman squatted down in a chair beside Sara. The fastidious girl, at any other time, would have found discreet reason to remove herself. That she did not was evidence, even to herself, of a profound change of character. She sat quietly until she was dismissed.

As she made her way down the corridor, she met still another woman even fatter than the Pole, even more unkempt. The woman leered at her as she passed.

Outdoors, Sara paused in the dirty sunlight that filtered through the city's smoke. Her head throbbed. She drew a cool hand across her hot temple.

This was insanity, she felt.

"This must stop," she said.

The effluvium of decaying foods, emanating from an uncovered garbage pail at the curb, assailed her nostrils. The sudden realization that the odor was not unpleasant gave additional vehemence to her declaration.

"No," she said. "No, no!"

The negative sounded false.

She felt that from the windows behind her the man's scorching eyes were staring at her.

She moved on, aimlessly, the fashionably dressed object of all the truck drivers and loungers and drunks with which the neighborhood abounded.

But even as she moved away, she felt the magnetism of the house behind her. She was empowered to swim against the stream for the moment only, she knew, because it was the will of that man with the ice-cold hands and the mincing walk.

She moved heavily, unmindful of her direction. And what did direction matter when, with a velocity she was unable to brake, she was being propelled toward some target she had not chosen for herself; indeed, when horrifying outlines were but dimly suggested by those lightning flashes of knowledge.

A red neon sign attracted her. She walked through the door. She sat down at a little table in a dirty barroom. The oilcloth on the table was crumbly with broken pretzels glued to the cloth with sticky beer. Near her chair on the floor stood a china cuspidor, tobacco juice dripping down its sides.

Sara ordered a drink.

WHEN you walked into the Salon de Camp-d'Avesnes, in the smart shopping district of Chestnut Street, you found yourself not in one of those modernistically mirrored, chromiumed and ebony-enameled palaces of trade, but rather in a museum. You were not buttonholed by one of those chic wenches with the trick French accent who, while catering, looks down her pretty nose at you. You were left to roam at perfect ease.

If, by chance, you had a mind to perfume, there was a glass case discreetly out of the way at the rear and discreetly attended by a serene, well turned-out woman in middle life. It was Pierre's way of explaining to the world that not only was he proud of his museum but that he could get along quite well without trade.

The room itself was elegant in the gold and white and satin of royal and eighteenth-century France. But you appreciated at once that the chamber was only a setting for the many exquisite objects.

Here, on this slender Louis XV stand, stood an Egyptian jar, disinterred from the tomb of a Pharoah when it still held the fragrance of the perfume it had once contained.

Here, in a case, were samples of the first vials brought to France from the Holy Land by crusading knights.

There were sachets from the court of Queen Elizabeth. There were matching necklaces and rings, whose centers held perforated boxes for perfume.

There were gold and silver and ivory castlettes and printaniers which appeared in the courts of England and France a century after Elizabeth. There were perfume lamps and perfume pans and perfume bellows, forerunners of the atomizer.

There were thirteenth-century finger bowls, which once held rose water.

There were papier-mâché rouge boxes hoary with age. There was a mother-of-pearl coffret in which Catherine the Great stowed her perfume flagons, her pomade jars and ivory manicure tools. And from all ages and all countries there were rare and costly vases.

Yet, it was not this room Pierre called his "crossroads of the world."

This was the large vault at the rear in which he stood this Saturday morning, staring vacantly at a row of glass jars.

There were products here worth more than their weight in gold. There was soft fatty civet from Abyssinia. There was castor from Russia. There was Tonquin musk from Tibet, benzoin from Siam, storax from Asia Minor. The oils of ylang-ylang and jasmin, of rose and palmerosa were here—oils measured by the precious drop. There were balsams and gums. And there were also synthetics and isolates, for chemistry had brought the Salon de Camp-d-Avesnes a very long way since Gervase had set up his little shop on Front Street.

A shadow crossed the steel door to the big vault. Pierre glanced up.

"Oh, hello, David."

"Busy?"

"Not at all, son; come in."

David stooped to enter the vault. He peered at the illuminated shelves.

"Quite a place you have here."

Pierre beamed.

"Just about anything you'll find in the trade. Never been here before?"

David, inspecting the labels on the containers, shook his head.

"Got ambergris?"

Pierre grinned.

"I knew you'd ask that right off. Everybody does. Seems all the public knows about perfume is what they read in the papers—fishermen picking up a chunk along the beach. Yes, I've a little. That's it there. Don't need much. Use it only in one of our products. Gives diffusiveness, you know. You probably didn't."

David pulled out a pack of cigarettes and started to light one. Pierre held up a pudgy hand.

"Not here, please. Too big an investment and smoke's insidious. Jasmin oil there. What's on your mind?"

There was a bench in the vault and David

sat down, legs wide apart, hands loosely clasped between.

"Sara," he said with frank directness.

Pierre looked at David shrewdly.

"H'm-m-m."

Pierre's left eyelid dropped and he fingered his mole. He said:

"She's been pretty restless lately."

"It's more than that," David said. "She's—growing pretty cold."

Piere said, "H'm-m."

He said it with more force. He added, "Think there's someone else?"

"N-no," David said hesitantly. "No. I'm pretty sure of that. I don't know what. I thought perhaps—you'd know."

Pierre, too, sat down on the bench. He didn't look at David. He stared at a bottle labeled "methyl phenyl acetate," a puzzled look in his eyes.

"I think she's sick," Pierre said gruffly. "But you can't tell her anything. She's bull-headed like her mother. Been moody. Got circles under her eyes. Noticed last night her dress was loose. Losing weight, I wouldn't wonder. Needs to get away, that's what. But when I said so, she flounced out of the room."

Pierre's eyes, usually so merry, were somber now. He became contrite.

"My fault, I suppose. Don't bring her up right. A man can't raise a girl. Shouldn't have tried."

David hoisted one leg over the other, leaned back and jammed his big hands into his trouser pockets.

"I don't think," he began slowly, "it's that so much. I think. . . Well, there might be something wrong with . well, with her. . . ."

Pierre tapped his temple with a fat finger.

"You mean here?" he asked in surprise.

David nodded.

"Can't see how you figure," Pierre said.

"I don't. It's only something I feel."

"H'm-m. I know. You're sensitive to things. I am, too."

"Maybe," David said. "And maybe it's something else. Do you remember Heath, the Great Dane we had that got hydrophobia? I could tell something was going wrong, but I couldn't tell what. And those Ayrshires of ours. Why, people think one cow's just like any other. But they aren't. Each one's a little different. And sometimes I see where one's becoming quite a bit different, gets some crazy idea in her head and wants to raise the devil."

David fell silent then. Along with his other troubles, he had suffered a speech defect when younger. He had learned to control his words, to force one to follow the other in slow measure—and never to say too much. He'd said too much now and he knew anything else he said would jumble up.

Pierre's eyes remained fixed on the bottle of synthetic odor of gardenia.

"What's the answer?" he asked finally.

"W-well," David said slowly, "I thought maybe if she saw a doctor. . ."

"She won't."

"I thought she wouldn't. But if there was some way of having a doctor see her, without her realizing. I mean—"

"Just a regular sawbones?" asked Pierre sharply.

"N-no. A specialist."

"A physchiatrist?"

"That was my idea. I just didn't want to say it."

Pierre nodded.

"Might help. Might not. Hardt's a good man." He added, cautiously, "So people say. But I know him pretty well. If I could get him up to dinner tonight. . . . I'd want you there, too."

JUSTIN HARDT was a spare man with a very good opinion of himself and a booming voice. He was tall and he had long legs and he was fifty-six. His face was long and the leathery flesh hung in folds at the chin, giving him somewhat the loose look of a bloodhound.

His forehead was high and at the temples his brushy brown hair was beginning to show traces of gray. When he looked directly at you as he always did in conversation, his slate-blue eyes peered penetratingly through pince-nez glasses which were insured against breakage by a length of black silk ribbon running down to some secret recess of his vest.

The vest itself and its two dozen double-breasted companions which hung in his handsome bachelor's chambers at the Racquet Club were of the novel breed the world terms "fancy." There were checks and stripes and extravagantly woven patterns in colors that ranged from cream and dull yellow to blues a tint too brilliant and greens a tint too bright.

Their jeweled buttons gleamed against the immaculate cloth, but, on the whole, on such a man as Dr. Justin Hardt, they did not look out of place—either with the semi-cutaway and striped gray morning trousers which encased his person by day or the dinner coat into which he invariably shrugged at five o'clock each afternoon.

Into this dinner coat Dr. Hardt had shrugged at his regular hour this afternoon to appear at seven for dinner at the Fountain Head. And there, with the dogmatic dignity which characterized his lectures at the Graduate School of Medicine, Dr. Hardt filled every

cranny of the library with his resonant bass voice.

It was said of the doctor that if he did not scare you to death he would bludgeon a cure into you. He excelled in expressing his own firm convictions. And he expressed them with a warmth that bordered upon the rudeness for which his own social stratum is notorious.

Tonight the quiet detachment of his host provided fertile ground for Dr. Hardt's bombast, so that he was not in the least disturbed by the tardiness of Sara.

"No, sir, that is not so," he was saying in reply to an observation by Pierre about the death of Sigmund Freud. "I studied under Freud thirty-one years ago and know how wrong you are. He borrowed much more from Herbart than from either Charcot or Bernheim."

Pierre glanced thoughtfully at his watch.

"The fact is," Dr. Hardt boomed on, "Freud was wrong on many counts."

David, who was standing at the French doors peering expectantly into the shadows of the lane, turned around. He picked up a hammered silver cocktail goblet beaded with icy sweat. He sipped at it.

"She ought to be here by now," Pierre said

"Did she have her car?" asked David.

"Yes. Drove me down quite early."

David suggested, "Why not phone the garage?"

Pierre moved reluctantly to an alcove beside the fireplace. He picked up the ivory-enamled handset instrument and asked for a number.

There was somehing joyous in the nature of Pierre de Camp d'Avesnes that, despite worry, could not be entirely subdued. It was not that at this moment he was untroubled. But the brightness of eye, the little smiling curve about the mouth (outward evidence of his fundamental belief in the rightness of all things) contributed to lessening the gloom with which he thought he spoke.

"Car's still there," he said.

"She'll be along," Hardt said, cheerily.

David, who knew Pierre better, asked, "Didn't she leave any word?"

Pierre shook his head.

A wide beam of bright light glared at that moment against the square panes of the French doors and stamped blocks of brilliance on the room's opposite wall. The sound of an automobile in second gear was heard. The sound of tires crunching on gravel stopped abruptly. The three men could hear a motor idling.

Pierre moved wonderingly through the open door into the large, long hall. He passed on to the front door. Almost as he reached it, it swung open in his face. Sara staggered in.

She giggled. Her low, musical voice was thick.

" 'Lo, Pierre."

Pierre stared at her.

" 'Smatter? Never see 'body drunk?"

She reeled past him, saw four people in the library, started in, staggered and grabbed at the door frame.

" 'Lo, Doc Hardt. N'know you had twin."

Hardt stiffened. Then she saw the two Davids. She approached them unsteadily. As she neared, the two Davids merged into one and she grasped at his coat lapels and looked up into his face.

"Darlin'. M'drunk. Glorious' drunk. Darlin'. Cab man waitin'." She tried to nod in the direction of the door. "Son'gun want' eight dollar bring me all way Sou' Stree'." Her long lashes and the white lids drooped over her eyes. "Pay'm, somebody."

David was holding her when she passed out.

* * * *

It was the following Tuesday before David's vigil was rewarded. Sunday, Monday, and for six hours now he had stood in the doorway of a vacant store front on South Street.

He fretted. There was work to be done on the farm. He hated inaction. Instead, all that he had for result was a carpet of burned cigarette butts on the cement—and that cement became harder every hour.

He had carried Sara to a sofa, had brushed past Pierre in the hall and had gone outdoors to pay the cabby himself.

"Where did you find her?" he asked.

The cabby said, "She barged up to me on South Street near Ninth."

"Did she say where she'd been?"

"No. But I think she's the same one I seen come out of a bar right across from my stand."

David had spent a restless night. A hundred times he asked himself: But what was she doing there? And a hundred times he remembered their Halloween lark.

He pondered the gleanings of his knowledge of the world, things he had read, had heard, had seen:

Amazing cults into which some emotionally unstable women were drawn.

The strangely intricate methods of procurers and blackmailers.

The fascination used by unscrupulous rascals in plying their trades.

That man, now. David himself had felt attracted to him and couldn't explain it. But what a salesman the fellow would make with that personality!

He tried to analyze, with as much detachment as his heart permitted, the young woman who was Sara. Far too sensible, he concluded, to be "taken in." She had judgment, she had taste, she was discriminating, she was scarcely the sort to fall for a phony.

And suddenly David felt that the fellow was not a charlatan. All right, what was he, then? What could he be doing?

He dropped a cigarette butt on the cement, crushed it with the toe of his shoe. And then he looked up—and there was Sara stepping out of a taxicab.

He watched her turn into Ninth Street. He sauntered to the corner. When he reached it, she was already halfway along the block. Yes, it was the same house. He saw her stand for a moment on the stone stoop, a gloved hand resting lightly on the iron rail. He saw the door open and close behind her.

HE STROLLED past the house, casually—so he pretended—glancing at its curtained windows. A block farther on he turned and retraced his steps. He passed the house and a few other houses until he came to a vacant lot. Then he took up a new station.

He could see the stoop. After a time, he saw another woman enter. And another. And he saw a fat one come out and waddle slowly in the other direction.

An hour passed. David became uneasy. He felt the neighbors across the street were peering at him from behind their curtains. Once a policeman walked by and looked at him sharply.

When another thirty minutes passed, David began to worry. Then the door opened and Sara appeared. She stood a moment in front of the house, then began to walk slowly toward him. He wondered:

"She can't miss seeing me. What will she say?"

But when Sara reached the vacant lot, David saw that she walked with the dazed tread of a somnambulist. She looked neither to her right nor to her left. And when she was so close that David could, had he wished, reached out and touched her, he saw that her face—if it were possible—was more white and her lips more scarlet.

Impulsively he walked rapidly after her, caught up with her and grasped her by the arm.

"Sara!"

She stopped. Her head turned slowly. At first there was no note of recognition in her blank face.

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"Sara, for Lord's sake. .

She leaned forward, peering at him as if she were hunting something in the dark. Then recognition came. Her eyes blazed hatred. And while David stood in his tracks, bewildered, she shook herself free and marched away.

* * *

David did not retain his secret. He did not, it is true, trouble Pierre. But he stopped at a doorway on Spruce Street. There was only one difference between that doorway and a hundred other doorways in this center of the city's medical profession. The brass plate, which was just like all the other brass plates, bore the name: *Justin Hardt, M.D.*

A trim maid in a black dress and white lace-edged apron opened the stained-glass door. She led David into a large airy reception room. Double doors, leading into the doctor's office, were closed. After about five minutes they opened. Dr. Hardt stuck his houndlike head out.

"Oh, hello, Trent."

He motioned David in and seated him in a cozy chair on the opposite side of his wide mahogany desk. He offered David a cigarette and sat back, his full lips half parted, his blue eyes sharply on David's face, his fingers adjusted to his glasses. He was blunt.

"What's on your mind?"

David was equally blunt.

"Sara de Camp-d'Avesnes."

Hardt "h'm-m-ed."

"I don't cure dipsomaniacs," he said coldly. "Get Fulton."

"But she isn't," protested David, "a dipsomaniac."

"She looked like it the other night."

"It was the first time," David replied deliberately, "that I ever saw her drunk. And even if she were one, it certainly would fall into your specialty."

Hardt's tone was belligerent.

"No, sir; I draw the line there."

David leaned forward, his arms resting on the flat top of the desk, the fingers of his huge hands entwined.

"There's something there more than that," he urged.

Hardt nodded slowly.

"I dare say," he returned coldly. "There usually is something behind the craving. But I stay away from those cases. They injure my practice."

Words tangled in David's throat as they always did when he became excited. He struggled to control them. Finally:

"Now, see here, Doctor. If I can show you that there are other things—that—well, led up to that night. . . . I know—I admit—well, hang it! When a person's drunk is no time to give 'em a going over. I'm not crazy enough not to know that. I mean, I don't know anything about your work, but there were probably symptoms there that—if you saw 'em when she wasn't drunk—you'd assign to some other causes."

He was actually pleading. Dr. Hardt continued to stare into his face. His confidence in his own beliefs made him a hard man to convince of anything. But he listened, if impatiently, to David's recital.

David began by describing the changes in Sara in the last two months; the growing lack of interest that finally became listlessness; its change, with almost clocklike regularity, to nervousness that took her on lonely walks.

She had grown thinner; had lost appetite; yet there seemed to be no physical pain, for she made no complaint.

He told of the Halloween visit; how, since that night, her irritability had trebled.

"She goes back there," he said, and he described his vigil.

Dr. Hardt shifted his position with impatience.

"She goes back there?" he repeated. "Well, why?"

"I don't know. But you and I know that no young woman of good breeding messes around in that part of town."

"Unless she is addicted to drugs," Hardt said.

"I wasn't aware that dipsomaniacs go in for narcotics."

Hardt did not smile.

"Not normally."

"Well?"

Dr. Hardt picked up a pencil and began to tap it on the desk. And then he began to tap it thoughtfully against his teeth.

"If I return," he said, "will you guarantee she won't be drunk?"

David considered. He remembered that Sara had passed two saloons and had stepped into a cab.

"Yes," he said. He reached for the telephone and made arrangements with Pierre.

* * *

It was eleven o'clock when Dr. Hardt took his departure from Fountain Head. He had watched with interest Sara's reaction when she learned David was staying for dinner. Her eyes smouldered with a fury for which David had found no words that afternoon save to term them maniacal. And Hardt was not so sure but what David was right.

And then the fire went out and the eyes froze. And Sara, throughout the meal, seemed unaware of David. She had paid little attention to her food, save for the meat course.

She had sipped her wine sparingly. But—and Pierre noticed this with increasing complacency: and David, with wonder—she chatted brightly with Hardt throughout the entire hour.

Hardt considered, with the analytical detachment essential to his trade, that somehow she had divined the reason for his visit; that some super-intelligence (not uncommon in certain types of insanity) had warned her that he and she were pitted against each other as antagonists; and that, being a woman, she had thought to use her charm to throw him off the scent.

It might, of course, have been Hardt's imagination. He was prone to look upon each of his cases as a contest between the patient and himself, in which each sought to outwit the other. He had little time for the practitioner who approached the problem by attempting to gain the confidence and friendship of the diseased. There was a natural enmity there, he felt, and the more honest one was about it, the sounder the final cure.

Sara left them to themselves after the dessert. When they found her in the library, she had changed again. At first, it seemed to be reserve; but later, Hardt saw that she seemed to be listening for something. He saw a certain tenseness of muscle take her. It was revealed in her hands, which she gripped so tightly in her lap that the blood left them. And then the tenseness melted away before impatience. The fingers entwined themselves and released themselves and re-entwined themselves. Finally, without a word, she got up, threw a wrap about her shoulders and went outdoors.

Hardt, who had been prepared, after talking with David, to see physical fatigue (and indeed there were deep hollows under her eyes) was surprised when he moved to the French doors. Across the lawn he saw Sara striding with catlike agility.

He shrugged into his topcoat, and stood for a moment in the wide hall, fumbling in his pockets for a cigarette. He found one and inserted it between his lips and started fumbling for a match.

David said, "Well?"

Pierre looked up with gentle expectation.

But Dr. Hardt said savagely, "Good night!"

And he jammed on his hat and left.

A WEEK passed. And then another. David, uncertain whether he was ashamed he had spied on Sara, did not try again. He called at the house on four occasions. It was with trepidity, and he was uncomfortable in Sara's presence. He could see by the calculation of her look that she neither forgave nor forgot their encounter on South Ninth Street.

And that calculating look was something new in Sara. It had a hard quality dissociated from the Sara with whom David had fallen in love. Indeed, every change that manifested itself in this tall slender girl seemed to rob her of something of her feline softness and replace it with a harsh veener. David noticed that even the manner in which she handled her cigarette had changed: from feline daintiness to the jauntiness of a woman of the streets.

Dr. Hardt called three times, each time at dinner. And each time, Pierre thought, the man went away muttering to himself. He had known Sara most of her life; a sketchy enough acquaintanceship, true, but enough to assure him that he was watching the disintegration of a personality. And yet, what troubled him and what his self-assurance would not permit him to confess aloud, was that he was unable to classify the girl's mental make-up.

Meanwhile, Sara, three times in every seven days, appeared at the house on Ninth Street. Finally, there came an afternoon:

She sat, with the absorbing rigidity of a yogi, on a chair in that room where that man sat at his table. She was more aware, as each minute passed, of a serenity that flowed into her being. She was now beyond any resistance. In this state she yielded to the forces that played upon her. The time that previously had been but momentary in its flashes of understanding now lengthened into a vista of drypoint detail. In that vista she saw herself and the things that, more than life, she desired. Obscure longing was at last defined.

When she finally arose to go, the man nodded to her. He said nothing, but the understanding between them was as complete as if he had said:

"The next time is the end."

She was not impatient during the two days that intervened. Once during that time David called and found her complaisant. Even the scorn in her eyes was veiled. She agreed to ride to a neighboring farm. But on the way over and the way back she seemed absorbed with her own thoughts. And David did not press her to talk.

He, too, sensed the approach of a crest in her life.

The day came.

Had you seen her, walking south on Broad Street, you would have seen only a smart young woman with whom you wouldn't mind becoming acquainted. She wore her clothes with feminine distinction. You were perfectly aware that she was a woman. But if you had more proximate traffic with her than a passing glance, you might have feared the avidity of her eyes.

She passed South Street and turned east on

Fitzwater until she reached a maze of narrow streets and ugly alleys. Blindly, she turned first into one and then another, her eyes searching the scene ahead of her. Here? Not here. She walked on. And then, out of a twisted lane she emerged in a deserted intersection where, bravely snuggling the great wall of an abandoned factory, stood a tiny neighborhood grocery. In front of the grocery stood a rickety coach; in the coach a fat-faced dark-eyed baby slept quietly.

Sara braked her pace. Her breath caught. She glanced to the right, to the left. She glanced behind her. Her sharp eyes peered through the dirty glass of the store's front. Then, with one movement, she swooped like a hawk, gathered the child into her arms, and walked on.

She found her way to Ninth Street. She walked north. The child slept.

* * *

It was five hours later. Sara stood, doubtful, as if she had just emerged from a bad dream into the reality of daylight, in front of the house on Ninth Street. Her back was turned to it. She no longer held the child. There was hardly memory.

Or, if there was memory, it was more in the ragged form of those same lightning flashes which first had illuminated her mind when she began visiting that house.

The man—the fat baby, the Pole and the fatter woman; and the odor of burning fat. A pot with a black, fatty ointment.

Sara convulsed with shudders. It couldn't be! It was a nightmare. These things could not happen! Thank God for that! Thank God! And then her glance lowered to her hands. There was a black, greasy filth beneath the nails, clinging to the skin.

Wondering, she examined them more minutely. But suddenly, like ice water drenching her, she became conscious of the raucous screaming of a newsboy across the street:

"Woman Kidnaps Baby!"

He screamed it again and again.

"Readallaboutit!"

Now memory flooded her senses. Irresolute, then trembling, then appalled, she stared about her. Her hands clutched. But where was her purse? She turned back to the house. She hesitated. Go back there? There? Limply, she walked back up the steps. She put her hand to the knob of the door. She turned the knob and the door swung in and she entered.

There was something wrong. She could not know, in her fright, that it was only the mustiness of age. But as she advanced along the silent corridor, she was struck by something else: the depth of undisturbed dust upon the floor.

Chapter Three

PIERRE sat—stout, comfortable and satisfied—in his favorite chair in front of the fire. He had an excellent book on his lap. On the footstool at his feet the cat was curled. And, since there would be no blending for the next ten days, he was stealing the luxury of a pipe.

A pipe was a good thing. You tamp the tobacco to just the right hardness and you smoke it slowly, without heating up the bowl too much. And damn the perfume business, anyway!

Still, all in all, the fact he was rarely able to smoke might add to the ultimate luxury.

It did not take much to make Pierre happy. Sara, for instance. She really had improved, he thought. He'd noticed it tonight for the first time. The girl seemed actually to possess more animation. She hadn't sat, as she usually did when they ate alone, like a dolt. She had talked almost eagerly. Pierre, not one to search for deceptions, did not consider that she might have been seeking escape.

It was then that Manning Trent barged in. There was never much formality between the two men. Usually Trent merely walked in, picked out a soft chair and slumped into it—his long, thin legs stretched out and his cynical eyes darting about the room. But tonight he didn't sit. He confronted Pierre with an unfolded copy of the early edition of his *Herald*.

"You hear about this?" he demanded.

Reluctantly, Pierre put his book aside and glanced at the bannerline—eight columns of 120-point boldface type.

"Read about it hours ago in the *Bulletin*," he said with what he hoped was the proper note of disparagement. He was more interested in observing that Sara had entered the room and had seated herself quietly in a corner chair.

Trent, whose cynicism was interlarded with streaks of excitability, exclaimed, "Yes, sure! But you didn't hear they found the baby's head!"

Pierre sat upright.

"How's that?"

"You heard me well enough. They found the baby's head. Damned strange thing! Makes your blood boil. Found it in an alley between Eighth and Ninth near South."

Pierre heard a faint "oh-h" from the corner. He sucked at his pipe and became, after the first shock, more judicial. He said:

"H'm-m."

He scratched an ear.

"What fiend would do a thing like that?" Trent demanded. And when Pierre did not reply, Trent exclaimed, "A perfect outrage! Know what I've done? I've offered five thousand dollars for the capture of the baby's kidnaper."

There was a pause, and then Pierre said, "You mean your paper has."

"The woman was young," Trent said. "Somebody—lounger or somebody—saw her pick the baby up. Didn't think anything of it at the moment. Natural enough to pick up your own baby and go into a store. Not that he saw her go in."

"That's so. But this head."

Trent was unwrapping the cellophane from a cigar.

"Checks. Wasn't so badly battered up it couldn't be identified. But, godamighty, where's the torso?"

Pierre's eyes were on the corner of the room. The picture he saw there was that of a young woman of fashion who was disinterested in the conversation of men. Sara was examining her fingernails with the critical look of a female about to change her manicurist. Pierre said:

"Not being either the kidnaper or a clairvoyant, I couldn't say. Did the fellow get a good description?"

He thought, with satisfaction, that Sara was beginning to take an interest in the talk. She seemed to lean forward slightly, and then to settle back when Trent said:

"So-so. Young, pretty, blonde. But you know how those things go. Get a dozen witnesses to the same thing and you'll get a dozen different reports."

Sara got up and walked out of the room.

She was walking across the lawn, a light throw over her shoulders, when she heard David's voice behind her.

She halted, and her shoulders sagged in resignation.

"'Lo, Dave."

"Just drove over to get dad," David explained. "He's awfully upset tonight."

Sara replied:

"I noticed."

"Is he still in there?"

"Yes."

"Still—talking about that baby?"

Sara said. "Really, I didn't notice what they were talking about."

David thought he caught a false note. He became, quite suddenly, angry.

"That's a lie!" he exclaimed.

Sara stepped away from him. The mere movement forced him to plead:

"Please, that was a lousy thing to say. I'm awfully sorry. Guess I'm upset, too."

She remained aloof. But she was feminine enough to goad David on.

"I don't have the reputation of telling lies," she said icily. She realized instantly she had gone too far. David stepped forward and grabbed her by her shoulders. He shook her.

"And that's a lie!" he said. He said it between his teeth and this time he knew there would be no retreat. "Do you know where that child's head was found? Back of that house, that's where!"

He thought that she shuddered under the touch of his strong hands; then he felt the muscles of her shoulders stiffen.

"But, David," she asked, "why this? What does this have to do with me?"

He felt himself weakening. But a cloud that had obscured the moon passed over and he could look down into Sara's changed face.

"I think—plenty," he said. "What were you doing there?"

"Where?"

"That house."

Sara whispered, "Are you insane?"

David released his grip. And then he was aware that she had turned and was walking down toward the creek—a rather defiant figure, checkered by the shadows from the branches overhead.

* * *

The autumn was long that year. And down along the Neshaminy the woods retained their rich coloring far into November. In the clearings and in the fields, the amber corn stood in the shock; and pumpkin and squash lay between the shocks.

It had been a good year. There had been rains, and the Neshaminy was full. It raced joyously between the moss-clad rocks and grassy banks still green. And thwarted here or there by a small boulder, a current would explode into a silver shower of spray, and then race with abandon around the boulder.

Occasionally you would see a brace of gaily feathered pheasants strut into the open from a thicket. They would pause and listen warily, for men in hunting clothes were now about. You could hear their guns, now distant, now near.

Or you might see a rabbit hop through the field of shocked corn and disappear. And if you were lucky, and quiet, you might come upon a woodchuck sitting on its haunches, its forepaws—almost like human hands—tightly clutching some tidbit.

Pierre looked for these things. Each Saturday afternoon he tramped or rode through the woods and fields. He was not negligent of the beauty of the scene. And more than once he

drew to a halt and watched the gray squirrels playing tag among the branches of the swamp maples.

He was aware of the earthy perfumes, of the fresh smell of the wet grass along the stream banks, of the bitter exhilarating smell of burning leaves. The crackle of dry leaves underfoot and the distant baying of a dog were good things to hear. Yet, over and above all this, and even shadowing his obnoxious optimism, Pierre found his thoughts reverting again and again to Sara.

The change in her was now so definite. She had settled into a cycle. The nocturnal walks, once casual, were now nightly occurrences. They began shortly after dinner—a dinner at which she ate so little that Pierre wondered how she retained her strength.

The walks lasted longer than before. Often Pierre would be in bed when he heard her footsteps in the upper hall and the sound of her closing door. If, by some chance of a good book, he remained up until one or two in the morning, he might see her. But he was up and away the next day long before she was up. And Freda, serving his breakfast on one occasion said:

"The *Fraulein* in the day sleeps. Is ill the *Fraulein*?"

A man, Pierre thought, could have too good a nature. He should put it up to her: "You'll have to change your ways, Sara. Your life's become simply abnormal." And yet each time he shrank from it.

He knew that she no longer went into the city. She had dropped completely from the social orbit in which she had moved. She did not trouble to reply to invitations. She issued none. Her work with the Junior League was history. And, finally, David stopped coming.

Pierre himself did not change the manner of his life. Twice a week, regularly, he remained in the city. One of these nights he spent at the club; the other, either at the Academy of Music or at the theater. Yet something of the flavor of other seasons was lacking.

Ahead of him, as he walked this afternoon, his prize flock of white ducks waddled in their military formation across the path. They seemed hurried. They seemed excited. But they kept their formation and they kept close together as if for protection. They waddled a few feet along the path and then they turned into the wood and disappeared.

A little farther on, Pierre stopped. White feathers littered the ground. Some of them bore crimson stains. To one side, between the open roots of a tree, he found a mangled duck. It was half eaten. In the soft earth, leading off into the tangled brush, he saw doglike footprints.

The prints were large. Immediately Pierre pictured Heinrich's big Newfoundland and he became angry. It was one thing about which Pierre, usually so easy going, was adamant. A dog must be either a good dog—or no good at all.

He turned back along the path to look for Heinrich. The path led through the woods along the Neshaminy, crossed the creek on a narrow wooden bridge, and led up to the lawn.

He walked around to the back of the house and in through the kitchen door and into the expansive kitchen. Freda, at the large sink, was washing each of the thirty-two pieces of the small cream separator.

Pierre paused for a moment. To voice an angry word here was like breaking into a pleasing concerto. And Pierre was too sensitive to speak until he had absorbed the color: the strings of drying red peppers and the half dozen smoked hams hanging from the ceiling beams, the rows of apple jelly sparkling where the sun struck them, the Mason jars purple with grape juice, the small crock of rich yellow butter.

Finally: "Where's Heinrich?"

Freda, in slow motion, turned around and wiped her red hands on her checked apron.

"In the barn perhaps you find him, maybe."

She stared at him questioningly, her hands akimbo on her wide hips.

"That dog of his. He's killed one of my ducks," Pierre said.

She shook her head unbelievingly.

"*Nein*. The duck Fritz would not kill." Then she muttered something that Pierre, turning to go, did not quite catch. Had he still been looking at her, he would have seen a curious sight: Freda making a sign familiar to any Pennsylvania Dutch believer in hexerei—the sign of the horned fingers.

Pierre walked the two hundred feet across the back lawn to the barn. The barn, screened from the house by large oaks, was of a later date than the house. It had been built by a German immigrant, and was of an architecture distinct from the English Colonial of Fountain Head. It was of stone and frame and it was fronted by a large portico.

Under the eaves, visible to Pierre as he approached, two odd symbols enclosed by a circle were painted on the wood. Casual observation might lead one to think they were mere decorations. But a study would have shown that there was no balance; that there were no such symbols on the other side of the barn. Had you asked Heinrich what they were, he would have shrugged:

"Just for nice."

But Pierre, regarding them, knew that they

were gruttafoos—the toad's foot—and that they kept the livestock from harm by evil spirits. He mused:

"Wish they'd keep my ducks from Fritz." He added. "Silly idea."

His thoughts reverted with amusement to that night at the club when he had made out such a good case for the supernatural. "Too good a case," he considered. Still, all in all, queer things did happen in the world. What was Hardt, anyway, but a modern warlock—poking about with the greatest mystery of all, the mind?

Heinrich appeared from the barn, a rake in his hand. Pierre walked up to him and shoved his hands in the pockets of his leather jacket.

"That dog of yours," he began.

Heinrich, gaunt and tall in blue denim overalls that were faded by many washings, leaned on the rake.

"When I let you bring him here, you promised there wouldn't be any trouble. Well, he's killed one of my ducks."

Heinrich looked at Pierre sorrowfully.

"Fritz killed a duck?"

"That's what I said."

Heinrich shook his head with wondering slowness.

"It can't be so, Mr. Pierre. Fritz—too much I know Fritz. Gentle is Fritz. Old is Fritz. Good I feed Fritz. I make out it don't make sense, Mr. Pierre."

There was actual alarm in his brown face. He leaned more heavily on the rake. He stared down at the rake's teeth.

"Look, Mr. Pierre. Mandel's dog there is. That is Bryn over at the village near. In the township made Mandel Bryn keep. But loose again is Bryn."

Pierre said with determination, "Get Fritz."

PIERRE tramped over to Manning Trent's house that night. The way led along the old Post Road through the north end of his own land, around to the back of the high hill, down into a gully and then up a rising slope. It was through woods until he reached the wide lawn of Trent's house.

It was a moonless night, but the stars were out and by their light Pierre could see the big stone Norman house which Trent's father had built in the '80's as a country seat. It was solid and substantial and its wide front porch, running the length of the house, faced the State Highway a quarter of a mile distant. You could see the lights of automobiles on the road. Some of the cars turned into the narrower country road leading east to the village; and when they did, from the porch you saw only the occasional flicker of a red tail-light.

Mrs. Trent, a lean wooden-faced woman who never let her husband forget that her own family arrived in Philadelphia early enough to attend the first Assembly, came to the door herself. Pierre considered with malicious amusement that that, in itself was quite a compromise for her.

Pierre and Julia Trent had never been great friends. They passed amenities, but beneath the surface lay a certain antagonism. It had served him right, she thought, when Angelica left him. Pierre was too democratic; didn't keep enough servants around. Julia Trent could not be accused of that.

Manning was at his desk in his study. He had a batch of proofs before him and was going over them with a thick pencil.

"Monday's editorials," he said. "Have to watch everything down there like a hawk. Those fools would sell the presses from under me if I didn't look out." He put them aside. "What's on your mind?"

Pierre settled into a chair.

"Mandel's a tenant of yours, isn't he?"

"Mandel? Yes. Has that ten acres down this side of the village. Why?"

"His dog tore up one of my ducks."

Trent picked up his burning cigar.

"Oh. So you're getting it now?"

Pierre's left eyelid drooped lower, and his right eye blinked.

"What do you mean?"

Manning explained.

"Dave lost one of those Angora nannies he brought up from Texas and he's hopping mad. Night before last."

"I don't see what that's got to do with my duck," Pierre said. He added quickly, "It's not the duck I mind, but if Bryn is loose again. "

Trent leaned back and sent a cloud of smoke reeling toward the ceiling.

"Maybe Bryn's loose. Maybe he isn't. I don't know. But the talk is there's a wolf around."

Pierre said, "Nonsense." But only then did he recognize what it was Freda had said, what he hadn't caught at first: "—*die* wolf." He said:

"I thought it was Fritz at first. That's Heinrich's Newfoundland. But the footprints didn't match. What's this about a wolf?"

"So far," explained Trent, "just talk. You know how those things get around. This goat —Dave was trying to use 'em for a Northern cross-breed—was killed in its pen over on the west forty. That's down near the creek. David's man found the body in one corner when he went down to feed 'em yesterday morning. It was badly chewed up. Over in the opposite end of the pen the other goats were huddled together like scared—"

"—sheep," Pierre finished with a grin.

"All right. Marie, that's Julia's maid, sleeps over the garage. She said about midnight she heard a commotion down that way. She said the night before she heard a wolf howl. Well, if anybody's ever heard a wolf, you can't mistake it."

Pierre suggested, "Maybe she never heard one before." He sat back and crossed his pudgy legs and tapped his fingers on the arm of the chair. He said, "Hell, there haven't been any wolves in Pennsylvania since I was a boy."

"That's wrong," Trent said. "There was one trapped near Kane a year ago."

Pierre fingered his mole reflectively.

"H'm-m. I remember. It was a lobo. Probably hiked down from Canada."

"It was not a lobo. It was a Pennsylvania timber wolf."

"Anyway," Pierre observed, "it was the last one. The story said so. I read it in your paper."

"You don't always believe everything you see there, do you?"

"If I didn't, how could I believe there was any wolf at all?"

Trent, nettled, fell silent. But finally he remarked:

"That so-called 'last one' of anything doesn't mean much. Why, over in England they kept killing off the last wolf every year right up to the year eighteen hundred."

"I'd rather believe Heinrich's theory," Pierre said. "He was down at Mandel's."

"Did he see Bryn?"

"Naturally not. Bryn wasn't there. That's how he knew. You can't see something there when it isn't."

"Heinrich could. Drinks, doesn't he?"

"Not if I catch him." Pierre added: "If it is Bryn, you've got to do something. As I said, it isn't just one duck. Nor one goat. Next time, Bryn might go for some youngster. He's a big ugly brute; biggest police dog I ever saw."

"What could I do?"

"Either get rid of Mandel or make Mandel get rid of the dog."

Trent stared absently at the desk.

"He's a good tenant. I wouldn't want to run him off. And there's just another possibility. You remember that fool up in the Poconos—McFatish, McFadden, Mc. . . ."

"McFanahan. Breeds wolves. Peddles 'em to zoos."

"That's it. Isn't there a bare chance some of his might have escaped and come down this way?"

"Might. He'd never admit, though," Pierre said.

"If he did, he'd lose his breeder's license."

"They're lobos, of course. You said so yourself when we stopped off that time we were fishing near there."

Manning agreed.

"I ought to know a lobo when I see one," he said. "I used to hunt enough up in Canada. That's where McFanahan got his first pair."

Pierre was not satisfied when he took his departure.

ADOLF MANDEL was a widower. He was wiry and tough and red. He lived in the old Marcus place, a narrow, story-and-a-half white frame house set back from the county road just west of the village of Friends Meeting. He lived there alone, if you didn't count his five dogs of all colors and breeds. When people spoke of Mandel's dog, they weren't thinking of the other four. They meant Bryn.

Mandel worked the ten acres he rented from Maning Trent. He worked them hard. From early spring to late fall he gardened. He sold the produce. He had chickens and he sold the eggs. He had two fresh cows and he sold the milk. Sometimes he did some odd jobs.

He had two loves: the dogs and his beer at night. And on Monday evening, after the frugal supper he cooked for himself, he left the house and went into the county road and turned toward the village.

His goal was always the same—the big barn-like inn owned and operated by John Craven as a clearing house for fact, fiction and alcoholic beverages.

The inn's first owner had built it of brick at about the opening of the nineteenth century. The second owner had plastered over the brick. Now the plaster was falling away in places and showing the brick again. The only exterior evidence of modernity was a blue neon sign: *Beer, Wines, Whiskey.*

There was an atmosphere of permanency about the Well, from which not even the new neon sign (1934) or the new bar (1897) could detract. And men who knew John Craven's father in the '80's saw so little difference in the now-aging son that they were not conscious of a break in the continuity of ownership.

John Craven now was in his late sixties, a chunky, deferential man of middle height with thin, gray hair and colorless eyes. He always stood ready to loan a man a dollar or to listen to his troubles.

He was behind the bar when Mandel walked in. And he was agreeing meekly with Klonesterman, the little red-faced carpenter

who had a body like an ape and a voice like a bass drum.

"We oughter have a wolf hunt, that's what we oughter have!" Klonsterman said, nodding his head vigorously.

"Ye-ss," whispered John Craven.

Farney, the hired man at the Waters, set his drink down on the bar aggressively and said, "But if it *is* Mandel's Bryn. . ."

Mandel forced an opening for himself between Farney and Klonsterman and plinked a nickel on the bar.

"Who said it's Bryn?" he asked angrily. "It ain't Bryn. I keep him locked up like the commissioners said."

He held the stein to his lips, blew off the foam, drank. Then he replaced the stein and drew the back of his hand across his lips.

"Look," he demanded, turning to Craven. "Look. It don't make sense I'd go agin the commissioners, does it, John?"

John Craven drew thoughtfully on his cigar stub.

"No-o-o," he said slowly. "No-o-o, it don't."

"See there!" cried Mandel triumphantly. Craven was embarrassed. He said, after a moment:

"Y'know, there was a reporter feller up here from the city today. Came in here, he did."

Meade said, "Met him. Old man Trent sent him up. It was Dave's goat was lost first."

Farney, who was gaunt and white-haired, gulped his whiskey.

"Ol' d'Wigney los' a duck, too. Heinrich Derhammer tole me."

"A duck ain't nothin'," Mandel countered. "A fox'r a ferret mighta done that."

Farney shook his head.

"This weren't no ferret. Leastways, Heinrich Derhammer said there was tracks about . . . in the mud like. Like a dog's tracks." He leered at Mandel, then added hastily: "Or a wolf's."

Klonsterman shook his head.

"Ain't been a wolf in these parts close comin' to fifty year," he said. " 'Member the last'n kilt. I was just a kid. But Pa an' alla men, they fit to died. They got out an' they tracked'm down. They spread out fanwise an' they closed in. Took three-four days. Found'm down the creek back of Miller's place, near Lacey's Lane, that's where."

The men jabbered. It remained for little Nellie Sage, who was called a bit queer in the head, to create the real excitement—before a bug-eyed audience of women.

The following Saturday night she ran into Pott's General Store, out of breath, just before closing time.

"I seen it!" she screamed. "I seen it! I seen it jest now, over on Lacey's Lane!"

She stood panting, while half a dozen farm wives and village women—there for their last-minute Saturday-night shopping and a bargain of gossip—gazed at her with astonishment.

Nellie was nineteen and pretty in a pale sort of way. She was simple, hadn't had much schooling, and was maid-of-all-work for the Dawsons, whose farm was divided from the Trent estate by the Caldwell place.

Mrs. Potts, the fat wife of the store-keeper, grabbed Nellie by the shoulders.

"You seen what?" she demanded. She shook the girl.

"I seen it! I seen that thing!" Nellie shrieked.

"That big dog?" asked Mrs. Tilson, shifting her market basket from one arm to the other.

" 'Tain't no dog," Nellie said stubbornly. "I seen it. Never seen nothin' like it. I was walkin' nice as you please along the lane an' I come to the bridge over Bowling Creek near where the Millers used to live. I was walkin' to one side—the side toward the old dam—an' I crossed the bridge, an' right there it was, square in the middle of the lane."

"What was?" demanded Mrs. Potts.

"I keep tellin' you, don't I?" Nellie cried. "This thing. Big as life and white as snow it was. An' it had red eyes an' sharp teeth an' it looked at me—goshamighty, I near died! Near scared out of my wits, I was! It looked like the pictures of wolves!"

Her story went the rounds. It differed in detail, depending on who told it. Truth is a loose commodity, and it wasn't very long before some folks were telling how it was Mrs. Trent, not Nellie, who saw the thing, although nobody explained what the haughty Mrs. Trent would be doing walking along Lacey's Lane at night.

The thing grew in the telling. It became as big as a horse. It had the head of a tiger. Mrs. Trent was down for a week from fright.

Some of the men visited the spot and followed an old path along the bank of the creek. They found the prints of some sort of an animal, which seemed to bear out Nellie's story. But the prints were vague and they disappeared at the bank of the creek farther down.

THE rolling, somewhat wooded land of the Tilson farm sprawled on the south side of the county road, midway between the village of Friends Meeting and the Trent estate. Immediately east was the old Marcus place. The west line was the State highway.

Bowling Creek, cutting down from the

north, crossed Lacey's Lane, a half mile north of the Tilson buildings which fronted the county road. The creek skirted the farmyard, meandering south through the Tilson land and beyond, finally to join with the Neshaminy.

The last evening of November was fair and warm. And Leroy, who was four, was playing in the farmyard near the creek after supper. Near-by in the barns, his father—big, red-haired Henry—and his eldest son, Frank, were at chores.

It was dark, but the lights from the house and the electric bulb atop the barn gable illuminated the yard. And there was more light, too, when Mrs. Tilson threw open the kitchen door and stood, looking to her right, and then to her left.

"Leroy!" she called. "Leroy! Bedtime!"

There was no answer.

Mrs. Tilson's eyes sought the shadows of the shrubbery. Her voice rose:

"Leroy!"

She waited a moment. Then:

"Now where's that little dickens gone?"

She descended the steps and began touring the yard. She walked around to the front of the house, where the floodlight from the barn did not penetrate. She stood a moment, listening.

"Leroy!"

Her voice was tired. A car rolled out from the village and sped west. It passed the Marcus place and slowed down for the bridge in front of the Tilson house. The headlights glared on the lawn, erasing shadows of shrubbery and trees, and then replanting the shadows at bizarre and shifting angles. Mamie Tilson took the opportunity to glance all ways at once about the lawn.

Seeing her there in the white blaze of the lamps, you would have said she looked careworn and tired. She was not a large woman; she was not strongly built. Work or a farm is hard—and Mamie Tilson had borne six children.

"Leroy!" she called once more, and then continued on around the other side of the house where the lawn ended at the creek's bank.

She walked slowly to the barn and stood at the wide doorway. Tilson and Frank, seated on little one-legged stools, were milking the two Guernseys. The milk purred in rhythmic jets into the pails.

"I can't find Leroy," Mrs. Tilson said wearily. She passed the back of a thin, blue-veined hand across her forehead.

"Just about through," Tilson said. "Help you look, Mama."

He got up. He poured the milk into another pail. He walked into the tool room and returned with a flashlight.

"I thought he was with you," Mrs. Tilson said. "I wouldn't worry—but that *thing* and all. . . ."

"Now, now, Mama. . . ."

But Hank Tilson couldn't find Leroy either. And so he returned for Frank, who lit a lantern. They began searching along the creek.

"Little cuss, always wanderin' around," Frank said impatiently. He was eighteen and he had a date that night with the Potts girl.

They searched down the creek and through the woods till they came to the fence between their land and the Waterman's.

"Don't seem's he coulda gone this fur," Hank Tilson said. He stood in a clearing of the wood and swung the beam of his flashlight from one clump of bushes to another. He called out:

"Leroy!"

An echo replied. Then Frank exclaimed:

"Listen!"

He held his lantern higher and its circle of light widened. He looked downstream into the Waterman land. Hank Tilson sent the beam of his flashlight in that direction.

"Thought I heard a rustle," Frank explained. "Like. ."

"Pheasants maybe," Hank Tilson said. "Lots of 'em down here."

Margaret Potts didn't have her date that night. Hank Tilson went back to the house and he called two of his neighbors. And they told neighbors, and within two hours a score of men were beating through the woods and fields.

They spread out. Some, just on a hunch, went upstream till they reached Lacey's Lane. And some went as far west as the State Highway. But since Trent's land on the other side was enclosed by a close-barred iron fence, they didn't figure it necessary to go farther.

From the county road, night motorists could see in all directions lanterns and flashlights bobbing. And in the back lanes automobiles, loaded with men staring ahead and with spotlights swinging slowly in arcs, rolled in low gear.

The news reached the Well, where Klonsterman and Adolf Mandel were locked in a beery debate. Mandel left to join the search, and a few minutes later Klonsterman staggered out and was next seen weaving his uncertain way toward the Tilson farm.

But Leroy was not found that night.

It was ten o'clock the next morning when Tip Farney, who worked for the Watermans across from Fountain Head, left the neat, white stone Waterman house and tramped across the east pasture. He had a cross saw

with him and he figured on looking over some fallen trees. He came to the woods along Bowling Creek south of the Tilson land and he followed the stream down to its confluence with the Neshaminy in the southeast parcel of the Waterman farm.

There, by the light of day, lay the mangled blood-coated body of a little child.

STATE troopers came. Reporters and photographers followed. The State Troopers gathered at the spot.

"My God!" one exclaimed. "Look at that flesh!"

Another trooper gasped. And a third, eyes studying the ground said:

"God! See them tracks? Looks like the kid was dragged here!"

"Dog tracks, they look," said the first trooper.

"That's Bryn," Farney said with conviction.

"Bryn? Who's Bryn?" one of the troopers demanded.

"Adolf Mandel's police dog," Farney muttered with growing anger. "Lives up next to the Tilsons; dog's a bad'n."

They found a trail of broken twigs and brushed leaves leading uncertainly from the edge of the Tilson yard a mile and a half south to the confluence of the two streams. Hank Tilson looked on in stupor.

"But why—" he croaked. "Why didn't we see that last night?"

"Be hard," a trooper said, "at night even with a lantern. And maybe you weren't looking for—this."

"No, no," sobbed Hank. "My God, not this!"

The trooper added, "And some of the men tramped over it. You can see where they obliterated the trail. Now—see there. Here the tracks come out again and that's where the kid's body was dragged, breaking those twigs."

And then, after Hank Tilson went home to break as best as he could the tragic news to Mamie, the coroner arrived from Doylestown.

"Good Lord!" he cried. "Looks like the kid's been eaten. See those teeth marks. What's been going on 'round here?"

Slowly, the troopers absorbed the story: David's prize Angora goat, Pierre's duck, Nellie's alarm.

A trooper who specialized in such things made plaster casts of the animal's prints. They measured the distance between each imprint of each pad.

"Got a long stride for a dog," the trooper said.

"Bryn's a big dog," Farney said viciously.

"Were there any prints like this where this girl saw this thing?"

"Some of the men went down," Farney replied. "They *said* they found prints. I dunno. I wasn't there."

"We'll match 'em," the trooper said with decision. "How about those others?"

"You'll have to ask Dave Trent an' ol' d'Wigney."

There was evidence, from the confusion of prints, that the animal had remained for some time at the confluence of the streams. Then the trail led up the Neshaminy on the north bank. Here the prints in the soft earth were not so deep.

"Wasn't carrying the kid's weight any more," a trooper said.

The trail led for perhaps a hundred yards until, in the ooze of the creek's bank, it disappeared.

"Smart dog," a trooper observed.

"The tracks'll be on the other side," another said.

But when the troopers waded across the creek and began to examine the ground with minute care, they were puzzled. There were no tracks.

"Maybe waded downstream?"

"Dogs aren't that smart."

"Or came back on the side it left on?"

Two troopers on each side of the creek, they made their way upstream. They progressed another hundred yards. Finally:

"Found something," said a man on the south bank.

He pointed down to a point between the stream and a path that led west to the State Highway.

"H'm-m. It's smudged. Here's a better one over near the path. Hell! That isn't what we're looking for."

The other troopers gathered around, looked down. They saw a faint print of a small shoe. Then another and another.

"Like a kid's shoe—or a woman's," a trooper said.

Farney announced, "Might be. Kids come down here to play sometimes."

They searched for an hour for a reappearance of the beast's marks. They found none. So they went to Adolf Mandel's house. A crowd of angry neighbors stood in the yard.

Adolf Mandel stood at the front door of his house, facing the crowd.

He held a shotgun loosely under his arms and he shouted:

"One step more'n I'll shoot. I'll shoot, damn you! I'll shoot!"

"We want to see Bryn!" one of the crowd screamed.

"Bryn's been in all night, I tell you. I

keep him penned up like the commissioners said! An' you get offa this place."

"Get the dog!" a farmer shouted. "Kill the dog!"

"Thinka that poor Tilson kid!" shrieked an angry voice.

"Ha. There's Jim, gonna round to the back. *He'll* get at him."

Red-faced, burning with rage, Mandel glanced to his left. One of the men had detoured and was sneaking toward the rear.

It was then that Klonsterman arrived. He shouldered his apelike self through the crowd. Mandel saw him and cursed:

"You're the one done this, damn you! You'n Heinrich Darhammer an' all your dirty lies!"

Klonsterman spoke loudly, but he seemed to whine, too.

" 'Tain't what I come for. I come to tell what's true."

"Git the dog!" a man yelled.

Klonsterman turned to the others.

"Lissen, why don't ya? I *know* Bryn was in his pen last night. I seen him!"

Immediate quiet prevailed. Mandel turned amazed eyes toward him.

"Me'n Adolf was in the inn together, wan't we, Adolf?" Klonsterman bellowed.

Slowly, wonderingly, Mandel nodded.

"We was there when word come the kid was lost, wan't we?"

Again Mandel nodded.

"An' you went out to jine the search, ain't that so, Adolf?" Klonsterman questioned. "An' then I follered."

The restiveness of the crowd was reborn.

"Hell!" spat one man. "That don't mean nothin'. He went home an' called Bryn in an' *then* joined the hunt."

"No, he didn't," bellowed Klonsterman. "No, he didn't. I follered him an' I seen him on the road and he went right smack past here an' on up the road to Tilson's."

And the crowd grew quiet.

"And I come right here myself," Klonsterman continued, triumphantly, "an' I went 'round in back an' looked in the pen an' there—by jingo, there was Bryn!"

THAT night Manning Trent dropped in at Fountain Head. The weather had grown suddenly colder, and a wind had risen and rain had begun to fall. The rain on the roof sounded like the endlessly spasmodic roll of a snare drum.

The wind grew and the rain fell in waves. And some of the rain found its way down the chimney and fell sizzling on the log on the irons.

"And they're searching in this!" Trent exclaimed.

He walked to the French doors and looked out, his cigar gripped between his teeth. Pierre stood beside him. Together they saw lanterns bobbing in the storm—prints of yellow light, moving erratically.

"What else can they do?" asked Pierre. "Can't have that damned thing around."

Trent nodded.

"They're over at my place, too. There must be two hundred men out—besides the troopers." He paused to look as a light came nearer along the creek and then disappeared toward the back of the house. "Dave's out too," he said. "Tramping around." He laughed shortly, without humor. "Don't think he's so much worried about that hound as he is about keeping the men out of his rose garden. He's awfully proud of that garden."

"Reward up?" asked Pierre.

"Yes," said Trent, who was a member of the Township Board of Commissioners. "We put a reward up this afternoon when we met. Five hundred dollars. Isn't much, but the board hasn't much to spend."

He turned toward the heavy smoking stand where a siphon bottle of seltzer water and a decanter of Scotch stood. He mixed a highball. Pierre watched him enviously.

Trent sat down, stretched out his long legs and sipped at his tall glass.

"Did you hear it wasn't Bryn?" he asked.

"Not exactly."

"It wasn't. The police matched those prints they found by the body. They found some where David's goat was killed and they found those near Lacey's Lane. They said they matched up—same animal and all that—but not Bryn."

"I stayed in town after the concert last night," Pierre said, "and didn't see a paper till this evening on the train home. Heinrich did say the troopers were over and wanted to see where the duck was killed."

Trent got up again and moved to the doors. The rain was slanting into the porch.

"I'll put up another five hundred," Pierre said.

"Match it."

Sara appeared while Pierre and Trent still talked. She shed her raincoat and her rubbers in the hall by the open door. She came into the room quietly, making a wide circuit of the room, keeping her eyes fixed on the fire until she reached a chair in the far corner.

Trent's eyes filled with admiration. Here, he thought, was a girl after his own liking. He liked her loose walk, her calm detachment. He liked the look of her body, the way she dressed. Not many girls could boast her style.

He mixed a drink and offered it to her,

while Pierre looked on silently. Pierre had noticed on recent evenings—on those rare occasions when he was still up when she came in—that her nocturnal tramps seemed to revive her drooping spirits. Were she pale and restless when she left the dinner table, she had a touch of color in her cheeks when she returned. And her lips would seem even more full and more red and her eyes more bright.

This was not so now. Pierre said gently:

"You weren't gone long tonight, dear."

She touched her lips to the glass rim and shook her head slowly.

"There are men about," she said wearily. "They have guns. I was afraid."

"You're right," Trent said. "Some of those fellows are liable to take a pot shot at anything."

She did not respond. She sat and listened to them talk. Or *was* she listening to them talk? Shortly, Trent left. And for a long time Pierre sat and looked at his daughter.

His daughter!

But she was so unlike him. Suddenly, reason deserted Pierre—Pierre, who was so usually reasonable. He did not pause to think. There are times when frayed threads break within even the gentlest nature. He got up and walked to her corner and he faced her and looked down into her smoldering eyes and his own eyes were sultry.

"You have to tell me what's the matter!" he commanded. There was almost a note of anger in his voice. Yet there was frustration in the anger.

Sara looked straight ahead of her. She said nothing. And Pierre swore.

"Damn it! You're the coldest thing I ever saw. Haven't you any feelings? Don't you react to anything?"

Still she remained silent.

"Do you know a little boy has been killed?" Pierre demanded. "Do you know the whole countryside is out in arms? And you sit and say nothing! Day after day you sit. Week after week goes by and you don't say half a dozen words! Do you know there's hell loose in Europe? I doubt it. I haven't seen you once in the last month look at a newspaper. I haven't seen you with a book. Day after day you mope in your room. Night after night you go prowling about."

He faltered.

"You never play for me any more," he said, more quietly. "You don't eat. You don't see any of your friends."

And then Pierre's shoulders sagged and the energy left his voice. He placed a hand tenderly upon her shoulder.

"Oh, my darling," he pleaded. "My pet, what is the matter?" His eyes glistened. "You're all that I have, dear. I hate to see you like this. I thought Hardt could tell me. But he can't."

She moved at the mention of Hardt's name.

"Is that why he had been here so often?"

Pierre nodded.

"He is a psychiatrist, isn't he?" she asked.

Again Pierre nodded.

"And you think—perhaps—I am mad?"

Pierre could not bring himself to reply. She said, with such detachment that she might have been examining her soul from a window:

IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE BAT FLIES LOW

By Sax Rohmer

That the safety of the world was at stake the fabulous Egyptologist never doubted. And so, in strict secrecy, began the trek across the world to seek out the mystic source of evil which bridged the eons. And kept the ancient dead of Egypt awake and restless in their ageless tombs.

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MYSTERIES

"I may be. I don't know. I have strange feelings. Sometimes—I think I am living in another life, in another world. And sometimes I feel that all this has happened before. Long ago."

Her eyes fell and her long slender hands grew limp. Pierre asked:

"But where do you go at night, dear?"

She shook her head vaguely.

"I don't know." And when she saw Pierre's surprise, she said, "I must walk. I've always liked to walk. But—now it seems a passion. I feel I must, I must. When I come back to the house I feel somehow satisfied." She added: "So satisfied that—that nothing else seems to matter, except—oh, I want David so much."

Pierre said nothing. There was nothing for him to say.

Chapter Four

THE rain ended the next noon. A gray December canopy of clouds hung over the countryside. The hunt went on.

Word spread of the added rewards of Pierre and Trent, and the number of hunters grew. In Philadelphia and in New York, city editors assigned reporters and photographers to the hunt for the duration. Not strangely, for they were newspapermen, they set up headquarters in the Well.

At first the hunters centered upon and spread out fanwise from the points where the beast had left its tracks. They beat the brush and the woods along the Neshaminy and the Bowling. At first they worked loosely—in pairs and quartets. And it was each man for himself. But on the third night Farney was shot.

He was shot in the leg by an excited hunter who thought he was the quarry. After that the State Troopers took more rigid control.

The men then were organized in sections. Each section was led by a trooper. And the troopers studied maps and spotted the sections at widely separated points, so that a great circle with a diameter of four miles was formed. And then each section began to close in toward the center.

It took two days for all sections to meet at the center. But all that was scared up were a few pheasants and hares. And that night, five miles up the Neshaminy and well outside the original circumference of the circle, a baby cried.

It was the Heath baby at the Heath home in the village of Melton Crossing.

The Heaths were young. They had come from Canada. Dan Heath operated the village filling station. The station was located at the junction of two pikes. Behind the station the Heath cottage faced the Hatboro Pike. It was a one-story white house of frame with a wide lawn. It stood between the filling station and the Neshaminy and its creek-side lawn was partly lighted by a street lamp down the road.

Dan Heath was at work at the station when it happened. His pretty wife, Mary, was washing the supper dishes in the kitchen. Little Dan, not a year old, was asleep in his crib in his room. His room faced the creek-side of the lawn and the window was open wide; the night, for December, was warm.

Mary Heath heard little Dan whimper. And then she heard him cry out in fright. She wiped her hands on her red-checked apron and went into the dining room, and into the living room. She went to the nursery door and she opened it quietly. She looked. And she froze—

For in the subdued light from the living-room floor lamp she saw a huge white snout framed in the open window. Its jaws hung open and its sharp teeth glittered. Saliva dripped from its limp red tongue and its eyes glared hungrily across the room at the crib where little Dan lay crying. On the sill rested two big white hairy paws.

Mary Heath screamed.

She raced across the room and slammed down the window. The window caught for an instant on a toe of one paw. The beast yelped. Then, tugging free, it shot—a white streak—across the yard and disappeared in the shadows of the brush.

Dan Heath found his wife unconscious by the window, his son sobbing. And when he had bathed her head in water and she had opened her eyes, she began trembling as though chilled to the bone.

"Is he all right? Is he all right?" she kept asking.

Slowly, incoherently, she told what happened. And she kept saying:

"Its eyes. I never saw an animal's eyes like that! Everything about it was vicious—except those eyes. They seemed almost human. They seemed to plead."

And still later when she had gained some measure of composure—"I know a wolf when I see one. They can say what they want about dogs, but I wasn't born and brought up in Alberta for nothing."

That night, about the village of Melton Crossing, the hunt was intensified under a full moon.

• • •

There is a point on the boundary between

They knew that certain crones
worshiped the devil there. . . .

the de Camp-d'Avesnes and Trent estates, in the north sections, where the Neshaminy crosses from the latter ground to Pierre's. And there is a path along the south bank. And there, that night, David Trent walked alone.

The moon's white light filtered through the bare branches of the trees and spread a crazy lace upon the earth. David absorbed the beauty and walked in solemn loneliness.

What an insane thing life was, he thought. And his thoughts returned insistently to Sara. It seemed ages since he had seen her—but, at most, it must have been only three weeks. He tried to count the days.

Lord! he'd been so happy before. He wondered if the wreckage might, in much part, be blamed upon himself. Certainly, as a lover, he had been unromantic enough; had spent too much time with the farm; had fought shy when Sara wanted him to join in some youthful deviltry. Had he been afraid of life, afraid of her, or afraid of his own emotions? He remembered telling her:

"Life's well enough—to watch. The trouble is a fellow feels once in a while like sticking his fingers into the machinery. But he can't do that. He's liable to pinch 'em."

Sara had said, "But if everybody felt that way, there would be nothing in life to watch."

"I suppose so," he answered glumly.

Now he wondered: Was it that shyness that made him lose her? Was that why she became so cold? Or was it his suspicions in a mad moment? His maniacal outbreak that night on the lawn? But how could David possibly know what went on in her mind?

He tramped moodily along the path. He thought of his Ayrshires. Something wrong with them, that was definite. They hadn't been producing as they should, even for the winter months. The vet had been over, had found nothing wrong—physically. They ate well enough, but they didn't give. Suddenly David knew that they made no difference.

The path forked and one branch went through the wood onto higher ground and one ran down close to the creek, and David paused in indecision. And pausing, he thought he heard a quiet splash in the waters. And then he saw Sara striding easily up the bank.

IF, CONSCIOUSLY, David did not know why he was walking through the woods, he knew now from the tumbling of his heart.

Sara saw him and was not startled. She said, simply, "Hello, David." As if she had expected him.

He stepped toward her, stopped.

"But you can say something, David?"

He looked down at her face.

"What can I say?" he asked.

She said, softly, "You can say why you haven't been around lately."

He stared at her then. He stammered helplessly, "I—I didn't think you wanted me. You were—so cold."

Wistfulness crept into her voice.

"I do not feel cold, David."

Almost imperceptibly, she leaned toward him. And David felt a vague discomfort—as if some blurred signal were warning him of some equally indefinite danger. It was but momentary. And then he had her in his arms.

"Darling."

Over and over, again and again he kissed her smooth full lips. Over and over he stroked the velvet of her hair; and gently his fingers caressed her soft cheeks. But finally, when he held her out at arm's length to gaze at her, and to delight in that gaze, he was surprised at the look of her. There was impassioned yearning, hunger so vividly portrayed that he became afraid.

Arm in arm, they turned and walked back along the path. They walked without words. And David trembled. He could not analyze this thing that had happened. But he knew, with definiteness, that here was a relationship he had never felt when they were together before. Then he had adored Sara—but within the bounds of reason. Now, reason had fled; control had gone. Instead, a merciless compulsion attended him, grew more intense with each passing moment. The touch of her hand inflamed him.

They stopped once in a patch of moonlight. The discomfort seemed to return to David. He felt that, when she turned her face up toward his, the yearning in her eyes was but a mask; that behind the mask was calculation. It was as if she were watching, with the scientific coldness of a biologist, the hot growth within him unfold.

And so he stood, dimly fearful.

They kissed. And she smiled mistily. And then they walked on. And after a little they stopped again and David lit a match for cigarettes. Her hand held the cigarette to her lips. And in the flare of the match David saw her fingers.

"Dearest! Why, what's happened?"

He felt the pain his own. But she only glanced at her swollen fingers and shrugged gently.

"Not much. Still throbs a bit. I slipped and fell back there and cracked my hand against a tree."

Anxiously he lit another match to examine her injury.

"More like you'd crushed it," he said. He was aware that she was looking at him curi-

ously. Then she dropped her cigarette and with both palms reached up and stroked his face. And he dropped his cigarette. And again they were in each other's arms. They clung to each other.

They clung to each other. And when the first dizziness of delight passed, David felt that her kisses were more cruel than sweet. They were harsh. They hurt. In the breathless pause that followed he tasted blood from his lip.

* * *

An insulated wall rises between the classes of society, so that one class cannot really know the thoughts and reasoning of the other. Though each may hold possession of precisely the same facts, each will interpret those facts differently in the light of its own culture.

So Pierre and Manning Trent, materialistic men, spoke only of objective possibilities. But at the Well, men who feared God were not unequal to coating a problem with a paint of supernatural evil.

They were too close, for one thing, to the Hexenkopf—and to all for which the Hexenkopf stood. They could see, from high hills on clear days, that forested Witch's Head frowning starkly against the northern sky. And they remembered the dark stories of their grandfolk of how the witches from the very Dutch country in which they lived had gathered there.

There were men at the Well who had been close to the Hexenkopf—so close that they could see the ominous lights on the lower slopes. They knew that magic herbs grew there and that trees were stunted and died young. And they knew that certain crones worshipped the devil there.

Their forefathers had come from the north of Germany to the New World in the cramped holds of tiny wooden ships. They had brought more than themselves and their worldly possessions. They had brought their centuries-old beliefs.

For them, evil was a terrible reality. They feared God, but they feared the devil more. Their faith in demons was as real as their bodies and their spirits. And in the strength of that faith they had moved a mountain. Their horror of that damnably infamous Blocksberg in the Hartz was transferred, with their arrival in the Pennsylvania Dutch country, to the gloomy Hexenkopf of the Delaware Valley.

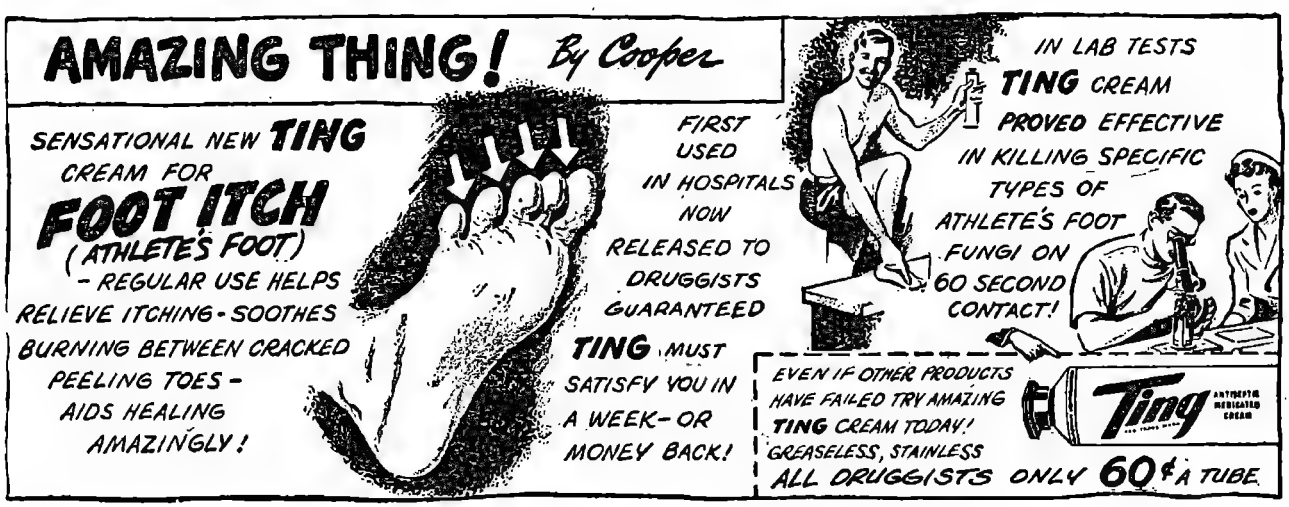
So, by that same metaphysical process, they had transplanted the hunger rocks from their native Rhine to the Lehigh. And they knew for a certainty that when the flat white rocks were uncovered by receding waters, the year would be a year of famine.

Hexerei still flourished beneath the coating that the less discerning described as twentieth-century civilization. Heinrich Derhammer drove Pierre's brand-new ninety-horsepower station wagon. But, when Freda was ill of a complaint, he was not averse to driving in that same station wagon fifteen miles over back roads to the farm shack of old Hans Ehlers, the hex doctor. There, for a dollar, Freda would buy a salve. In itself, she knew, the salve was not potent. Its potency was conceived by the immaterial ingredients which old Hans injected into it—the ingredients of conjuration.

And was there not the fine black stallion the Caldwells owned? Had it not come trotting down the road the day after August Haussler disappeared? The constable took it to the pound, but no owner was located. And finally, at auction, the Caldwells bought it.

"Queer piece," they said at the Well. "Queer piece it turned up the day after Augie went away. And along the same road he was last seen. Hear tell it's of high spirit, too."

Nobody came out and said what each one secretly thought. In the code of those at the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Well this was not done. A stating of ominous fact was sufficient. Not because one feared the jeers of his fellows, but because it was dangerous to name names and to place the finger too specifically on certain points that were better left alone.

That was why the experience of Nathan Messner and Heinrich Derhammer was received with the solemnity it deserved, and without comment.

It was four nights after the incident at Melton Crossing. Nate and Heinrich, armed with rifles, were tramping up the Neshaminy "to see what we might make out." There had been a light snow in the afternoon and then the skies had cleared and the stars hung brightly low like the points of icicles.

They had left Pierre's land and followed the path through the Trent place and into the small canyon through the hills back of the Caldwells. At the north mouth of the canyon the hills opened out, and there was more wood. And there was scrubby growth about under the trees. Suddenly Messner gripped Heinrich's arm.

"Hear that?" he whispered.

They stood rigid, ears acute. To their left, away from the creek, they heard the soft crunching of a moving pressure upon the snow and the muffled crackle of leaves beneath the snow. The sound neared. Heinrich slowly raised his rifle.

Then, into the clearing not twenty feet away, a huge white beast trotted. It was sleek of form and long of snout and it white teeth shone. Behind it, but vaguer to the eye because the shadows of the shrubbery fell across it, a second animal drew up short.

Heinrich took aim. He fired. The white beast leaped into the air, somersaulting out of sight.

"Him I got!" Heinrich cried.

"Ja!" yelled Nate.

Bedlam broke loose from behind the tangled brush. Heinrich and Messner followed. The sharp thorns of the thicket caught at their clothing. They plunged on in the wake of Messner's flashlight.

"Not far it can go," Heinrich muttered. But Messner had paused and was studying the ground.

"They's tracks," he said, "but they ain't no blood."

The animal sounds were distant now. And finally, there were no sounds at all. Moodily, Heinrich looked at the ground. They retraced their steps to the clearing. There was no blood there. Heinrich said wonderingly:

"Never did I miss like that a shot."

Messner's face was grim. He said with studied significance:

"Ya didn't miss. Ya had a perfect bead on him."

"Between the eyes right in," Heinrich agreed. He shook his head slowly, unable to comprehend.

He added, "But where is the blood yet?"

The men stared off into the wood.

"Smart devil!" grumbled Messner. "No wolf's so smart. Must have dog blood."

"Nein. It was the wolf. With your eyes you saw. Behind it another. A gray, a littler one.

"Whoever heard of a white wolf?" Messner demanded. "Snow white."

They fell silent then. For from a far distance across the country they heard a wolf's bay, at first low and whimpering, and then louder and louder and more piercing until, reaching a high hysterical note, it stopped abruptly. In the sobbing catch at the very end there was a quality almost human.

"Shall we follow the tracks?" Messner asked after a moment.

But Heinrich, trembling, stammered, "Not any more of this I want."

And he turned and staggered back along the path.

THE next day Pierre and Manning Trent lunched together in town. Trent lit a cigar over his coffee and wriggled his nose.

"Damned difficult," he said, "to imagine such a thing." His eyes roamed about the dining room where smartly tailored men and women sat at small tables; where suave black-jacketed waiters bent over the tables. "I meant, dammit, right here in the middle of civilization. Off in Central Europe or up North, I'd say 'yes.'"

"Still, I remember during the last war. I had the Paris edition then, you remember, and spent about a year there at the start. The wolves, packs of 'em, came right down to the suburbs. Two or three reasons: it was a bad winter and the Germans didn't leave 'em anything for forage, and I understand they were pretty much frightened by the big guns."

"None of that holds here," Pierre observed.

"No, and there's only the one wolf."

"Heinrich said two."

"I wouldn't believe Heinrich."

"But I asked Messner, too. He said the other just seemed to be a regular gray wolf. I walked up there this morning with Messner."

"Find anything?"

"Not tracks, if you mean that. The snow had melted. But—" Pierre drew a white envelope from his inside coat pocket. He opened it and withdrew a folded paper. He unfolded the paper and spread it before Trent.

Trent examined it, frowning at first and then dropping his jaw with surprise. It was a tuft of coarse white hair.

"Snow white," he breathed softly.

Pierre nodded soberly.

"Found it caught on a wild-rose bush."

"Why in thunder," demanded Trent, "didn't one of those two fools shoot?"

"Heinrich claims he did. Point-blank, at close range. And—they couldn't find any blood."

Trent snorted.

"Bah! He's either lying or was too scared to aim straight."

Pierre, never nervous as long as Trent had known him, tapped his fingers on the table cloth.

"I don't know," he said. "I don't know. I'm beginning to wonder if I'm crazy or if the rest of the countryside is. And, by the way, where was David last night?"

Trent glanced up, startled.

"Eh? What's that got to do with it?"

"Nothing," Pierre said quickly. "But I'm talking about craziness, so I wondered if you knew he and Sara were seeing each other again?"

Trent smiled.

"I'm glad to hear it, Pierre."

Pierre picked at his mole.

"I'm not so sure, Manning. Somehow, I'm afraid for Dave. They're back together but she's as moody as ever. Moodier, maybe. She goes grousing around the house, quiet as a ghost. I'm afraid she'll be a—oh, I was going to say bad, but it's a dull word—devilish influence on Dave. She's taking him on her nightly walks."

Trent nodded slowly.

"See what you mean. Come to think of it, David was out last night—pretty late. And the night before, too."

Keen observer of human nature, Trent could not but note the lines of worry on Piere's normally placid face. He leaned forward and his eyes met Pierre's.

"By any chance," he asked shrewdly, "you've something else on your mind?"

Pierre was a long time in answering, a long time in staring into Manning's face.

"I don't know," he said at length. And he repeated it. "I don't know."

* *

Justin Hardt described himself as consulting psychiatrist. Unless, as in Sara's case, it was necessary to observe a patient with discretion, he seldom left his office. And so it was something of an occasion for him to visit Pierre during business hours.

Pierre found him, on his return from lunch, in the main room of the Salon de Camp-d'Avesnes. He was stalking importantly about, examining the collection of *objets d'art,* and adjusting his glasses as he bent stiffly over each item. Pierre led him into his private office at the rear.

Dr. Hardt came directly to the point.

"I am up against a blank wall," he said.

It was enough that Hardt's egotism should permit him to make such a bald admission. But he went on:

"Nowhere, sir, can I find a case history to match hers."

Pierre sat dumpily back in his chair and folded his hands.

"But don't you always find everybody, everything, a little different? Take my business." He nodded toward a row of little vials on his desk. "Each of those is geranium oil. You can smell each one and *you* won't tell any difference. But one's Turkish and one's Algerian and one's French. *I* can identify each one blindfolded."

"Of course, of course!" thundered Hardt. "What I mean is that the gulf between Sara's symptoms and any other known type of abnormality is so wide it can't be bridged."

Pierre was thoughtful. At length he asked:

"Did you know she is amnesic?"

Hardt frowned thoughtfully, considering.

"Do you know that for a fact?"

Pierre shrugged.

"Those walks she takes. She told me the other night she doesn't know where she goes."

Hardt nodded. His lower lip protruded.

"She might be lying," he said. "Some patients are pretty clever, you know. Or there might be a hallucinatory condition there. I am convinced her physical health is basically perfect. Certainly, she hasn't lost weight."

"And she's even got more color now than ever before in her life," Pierre added.

"But she doesn't eat, sir."

"Not at meals. I've a hunch, though, she sneaks something on the side. I couldn't prove it."

The two men fell silent. Hardt, combing previous ground, said finally:

"And you say there's no family history of insanity on either side?"

Pierre bowed his head in reflection.

"I said that, yes," he responded slowly. "But I didn't check it. What I meant was, not to my personal knowledge. We've pretty complete family records, however. How about driving out tomorrow night? We'll run through them."

Pierre went home early that afternoon, heavier of heart than he had ever been. He warmed himself at the open fire in the library

and then went into his study beyond the library. He stood awhile, pursing his thick lips and staring absently at ceiling-high shelves of books. Finally, from one end, he recovered several thick and yellowed volumes.

He had not inspected them for years. He spread them out carefully on a long mahogany table. And he unfolded two expansive ink-smudged charts—the genealogical trees of his own family and of Angelica's.

He spent an hour with the charts and books. At first he merely thumbed the pages of the books.

Francois de Camp-d'Avesnes, Conte de. . .

The books were old. They were printed in French on old manual presses. Their paper was heavy and hand-made. Many of the pages were torn. Pierre translated automatically as he read.

"Hmm. Arnaud. There was a devil if ever there was one. Helped massacre the Huguenots on St. Bartholomew's Day. Nice fellow."

Not the most charitable reading in the world were these old accounts of the family de Camp-d'Avesnes. But then, it wasn't one of the most charitable families. It was lusty and populous, warlike and adventurous, arrogant, headstrong, intolerant. But if most of its men were untamed, some of its members had possessed a gentler nature. There were scholars and artists:

Jacques,

who had thrown away everything to go to Italy and study under Cellini.

Léandre,

who had become a cardinal.

Discovery is not always a sudden flash of light upon truth. As often, like growth, it is simply the culmination of a long labor in the soil. So, already, the seed of discovery had germinated within Pierre; and had begun to grow, and had sent out tiny feelers. It would blossom with suddenness, and Pierre would see the blossom. But after a time, he would remember the feelers and the little shoots. He would remember how the unfolding of each tender leaf had left him with restless wondering. And he would ask:

"But why, why didn't I understand this, then?"

Perhaps the suspicion, so dormant in his mind he did not know it as suspicion of anything specific, needed—like the plant for fruition—the touch of sun-flooded reality.

Still daylight out, the sky was heavy with clouds. And Pierre turned on a green-glass-shaded desk lamp. He thumbed the pages more slowly, pausing to read and reread entire passages.

Victor . . .

"Now, what was there about Victor?"

He left the book open upon the table, and hung the Camp d'Avesnes family tree upon the wall.

"Yes, of course. Here it is. The one who married that ugly Bourbon. Put a touch of royalty in the strain."

He studied the chart in more detail—the main stem of eldest sons and sons of eldest sons.

Victor
Eugène
Armand II
Paul
Jérôme (l.g.)
Henri III
Gervase
Gaspard
Hilaire
Henri IV
Pierre

"And Sara," Pierre murmured. "End of the line—a woman!"

He had blandly shrugged off that genealogical fact before. He was too cynical a man to feel much pride in family. It was the individual that counted. He could examine, dispassionately, these old tomes and this chart and see them but as the record of a drama in which he appeared in a minor rôle in the last brief scene.

BUT, he wondered, was he warranted in examining his ancestors with so much aloofness? Heredity counting at all, wasn't it possible he'd have been a far different man but for the traits each of so many generations poured into the common vessel?

Gervase there, who fled the Revolution and settled in Philadelphia. Pierre had his business.

And Jérôme hmm, what's that "l.g" stand for?

He moved to the table and opened another volume, and thumbed the pages slowly. He asked himself impatiently:

"Why don't these books have indices?"

Getting there now. Here's Armand II. All about whom he married and whom he begat. Armand II wasn't much and there wasn't much about his life. Nor his son, Paul. Here it is—Jérôme Jacques, 1726-63.

Pierre began to read. He read carefully.

"Oh, yes. Remember now."

And then his jaw dropped and he stared off into space, and his eyelid drooped still more.

"Utter nonsense, of course!" he exclaimed. And he got up and walked to the chart and ran his finger up the family trunk.

"Jérome and before Jérome, Paul. Before

Paul, Armand II. Before Armand II, Eugène. And Victor. And Victor's father, Henri II. And Guillaume. And then . . .

"Fernand, 1569-1625 (l.g.)"

Pierre counted them off.

"That's seven, all right. Still. . . ."

And then he counted forward, beginning with Henri III.

"That's seven too," he said uncertainly. "But it's ridiculous—"

Uneasy of mind, he walked restlessly about the room.

"There's the disease, of course. But you wouldn't think it would wait so long to break out." He paused and he considered, in an effort to reassure himself: "Nobody denies there's such a disease. Or was. A form of madness, certainly. A type that couldn't possibly be hereditary. . ."

He paused reflectively at the window. He looked out at the wide lawn and the creek skirting the far edge. Behind a line of stark leafless trees the clouds were breaking in the southwest and shafts of cold yellow from a sun now reaching near its southern terminus slanted through the trees. The light struck the trees and pressed long shadows on the lawn. And just then Sara walked around a corner of the house and paused in a patch of sunlight.

Pierre saw her. And then his mouth opened and his good eye grew large and round. He stared. And then he began to tremble so violently that he gripped the sill for support.

His thoughts in utter confusion, he sat in his study for half an hour; sat, his eyes open, seeing nothing.

"Have to take hold of yourself," he kept repeating. "Have to take hold."

The oftener he said it, the more shaken he was.

"Illusion," he said. "Illusion."

But he knew it wasn't.

"Have to take hold," he said.

His head was hot. His hands were ice. He arose and staggered slightly. Swaying, he walked into the library. Heinrich was there, bending over the fire to place a new log. He stood up and turned at the sound of Pierre's footsteps.

"Himmel! So white!" he exclaimed. "Is sick the Master?"

Pierre took command of himself for a moment.

"Don't be foolish, Heinrich," he said gruffly.

But even his gruffness was so unusual that Heinrich continued to stare. Pierre said:

"That's all, Heinrich."

Heinrich left the room.

Pierre went to a cabinet and opened it. He selected a bottle of brandy. His hand shook as he poured. He gulped it, and poured another. And this time he added soda. Then he returned with the glass to the study.

He sat in a heavy leather chair and tried to relax. His jumbled thoughts and emotions seemed to take on some semblance to coherence.

He thought: curious how a little linquor will help straighten you out. He thought: ought to drink oftener. He thought. . . Indeed, he tried to think of everything and anything but the one central overwhelming fact that kept hammering back at him. Finally he thought:

Have to face it.

It might have been time or decision or both, rather than the brandy, that in the end brought matters into focus. He could see now how his experience simply fitted into a pattern. It checked so nicely with so many happenings that previously had left him puzzled.

Sara, taking her nocturnal walks.

Sara, returning and entering the library and keeping in the corner. . .

He talked to himself. He talked aloud. Finally, he could ask with almost a suggestion of his former urbanity:

"Well, then; what's the next move? Something's to be done. Must be some solution. Solution to everything else."

He charged himself, "Have to keep quiet, of course."

Then he questioned that. Of course? Suddenly he thought of David.

"Oh, my God!"

He couldn't keep quiet. You can't let a baby crawl into the path of a locomotive without at least making some attempt to save it. But.

Take it up with Hardt? That idiot? Even with Manning? Pierre recoiled at the suggestion.

THE next night, within ten minutes of each other, Justin Hardt and Manning Trent arrived. They found Pierre as they had never seen him before: nervous, ashen-faced, dejected, and somewhat drunk. But Pierre had reached his decision.

He talked, at first a bit garrulously. He had framed what he was going to say, and how he would develop each item, point by point.

They sat about the fire in the library. Hardt, who liked to talk himself, became impatient. But he listened none the less. And that was all Pierre asked. Once in a while Trent broke in:

"Oh, now, Pierre! After all, we're men of experience—not imbeciles."

"We'll argue the points later," Pierre replied once. "But just now—"

And he went on talking.

Finally he finished what he had to say. Hardt said with his professional air of assurance:

"It is circumstantial evidence, sir. Every bit of it! And, sir, it is not very good circumstantial evidence at that."

"We may as well be frank," Trent said, and there was a hint of amusement in his eyes. "When a good, solid, substantial citizen goes off the deep end, he does it right. Plain fact is, Pierre, you're drunk."

Trent got up then and mixed a highball for himself. But Pierre cocked his head and listened. He said:

"She's coming down the stairs now. I'll call her in here before she goes out. I want you to take a very, very close look."

He arose and walked unsteadily to the hallway door.

"Pet, come here a moment."

Sara, dressed for a winter's walk, entered the library slowly, almost reluctantly.

"Stand under that light, dear. No not quite under. To one side."

Sara hesitated. She protested, "But why?"

Pierre's voice rose slightly.

"Do as I say, dear. Near that light."

She looked at her father questioningly. Then she obeyed. Pierre turned to Hardt and Trent. He kept his eyes on them; they, theirs on Sara.

Manning shook his head.

"Don't get it," he muttered. "What am I supposed to see?"

"Keep looking," Pierre said evenly.

Hardt said in a low voice, "Man, I see nothing."

Pierre glanced at the bewildered girl to reassure himself.

"You will. Keep looking."

Then, almost as one, both men gasped.

"That's all," Pierre said grimly. Wondering, Sara left the room. Nor did either Hardt or Trent take their astounded eyes from her until the door closed. Then—and only then—did either speak.

Trent's voice shook.

"Good God!" he exclaimed. "She hasn't any shadow!"

There was no occasion for the three men to speak for the next several minutes. There was little enough they could say; little enough—for the vocabularies of skeptics are of limited use in such situations. Too, when the first shock began to wear and paralyzed nerves began to react tremulously, both Hardt and Trent needed liquid stiffening—a fast one, and a long, tall one.

Hardt's face was white. His pince-nez spectacles tilted crazily on his nose and he did not trouble to straighten them. He sat slumped in a heavy chair and kept looking at the door through which Sara had disappeared. His pompousness was gone.

It was Trent who managed to speak first. He said with dull tonelessness:

"I suppose—this means she killed the Tilson boy."

He said it questioningly, as if he knew it for a fact, yet didn't want, couldn't bring himself, to believe it. Pierre did not give him the satisfaction of an answer. Instead, he, too poured himself a drink.

"Don't think I'm callous," he said, finally. "But I'm twenty-four hours up on you and I've had—well, time to recover from the first jolt. I—I'd been looking over the family history when I discovered it. She was on the lawn. The sun came out."

He stood by the heavy smoking stand where the whiskey bottle stood. He placed his glass on the table and walked the length of the library to the study door. He disappeared momentarily, then returned, carrying a book and the big chart. He staggered slightly.

"Couldn't quite figure," he said thickly, "that l.g. beside those two names—Fernand and Jérôme. But I know now. *Loup garou*—werewolf."

Trent took the book without enthusiasm and began thumbing slowly through it.

"You'll find it all there," Pierre assured him. "Even the story—remember?—I told at the club that night. The one about Old Hugues."

Trent said dully.

"Yes. I remember. Thought it was claptrap. And you, Doctor, argued the point. Amusing, of course. You. Did you believe it?"

"No. No, I don't think so. Or I might have connected it with Sara's—illness. But what I didn't tell that night—the part I forgot—was what you'll find in the book. Hugues' soul was finally saved. Saved? Well, at least it gained quiet. But it was only at a price to the devil, a quite gruesome price."

He paused. He sipped from his glass. Hardt looked at him with glazed eyes. Pierre paused for so long that it seemed he had forgotten what he was saying. Trent impatiently prodded him:

"You were saying

"Yes. A gruesome price. The curse was to rest on the eldest member of every seventh generation. Well, there's your chart. You can count up. Sara's the seventh since Armand." He added with quick bitterness, "Thank God, she's the last, too!"

THERE are shocks in lives so violent they are not quickly absorbed. Absorption takes time, and only little by little is the full picture comprehended. So it was with Trent. He said abruptly:

"But man, this means she's lost her soul."

And then Hardt finally spoke, trying to pull himself together, trying to implement his words with something of professional objectiveness:

"I don't," he said, "believe in the soul.

Pierre shook his head.

"I do—now."

And then again there was a silence. And at length, again, Pierre began to speak:

"It wasn't that the curse just happened—automatically, so to speak. If you read the accounts there," he leaned forward and tapped the book open on Trent's knees, "you'll find a process. The devil made the approach to the doomed victim, who then became a warlock."

He stopped suddenly. Then he exclaimed:

"That's it! David told me about visits she made. Remember where that baby's head was found—the one you posted a reward about?"

Trent glanced up fearfully.

"Yes. Of course. Yes. South Ninth Street."

"She was visiting a house there. So David said. He followed her one day. He was pretty worried. I haven't the slightest doubt that it was there she sold her soul."

Trent shook himself. Reason was tiding back to replace his mental paralysis.

"Damned impossible business!" he exclaimed. Pierre said:

"Very well—but *you* saw."

"Hallucination," Trent said gruffly.

"And would we all three of us see it at the same time?" Pierre asked.

"Why not? There's mass delusion, isn't there? How about that, Doctor?"

"It's been known," said Hardt slowly.

Trent, reassured, nodded. He said:

"We might have been able to see anything after you gave us your rigamarole. Power of suggestion."

"I did not," Pierre replied evenly, "so much as suggest the absence of a shadow. All I said was to examine her closely."

Hardt nodded judiciously.

Trent was unconvinced.

"Matter of thought transference, then," he said sullenly.

Pierre's smile was grim. His hold on himself was tightening now and the effects of the liquor—potent for a man who hadn't had a drink in two years—were wearing thin.

"You wouldn't," he inquired smoothly, "argue against the occult by contending I used an occult power to show you something that wasn't?"

"There's nothing occult about telepathy at all." Trent maintained doggedly. "It's a scientific fact."

But Dr. Hardt shook his head.

"Scarcely, sir," he said. "There have been experiments. But nothing proved."

Then, again, there fell an island of tormenting silence. Trent arose and prowled nervously about the room. Suddenly he stopped in his tracks.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "She's out there now!"

Pierre said, gently, "And David's with her."

Trent turned on him.

"You can't mean . . .

Pierre shook his head, gesturing with a shaking hand.

"I don't *know*. But Heinrich said there were two. You can telephone your house."

Trent reached for the telephone. He called his own number. His hand was steady. And his voice. He said:

"Oh—Julia? Is David in?" His voice faltered then. "What time?"

He replaced the instrument in its cradle. And now his hand shook. And his figure was limp as he crossed the room to his chair. It was not necessary for the others to question him.

"It was curious," mused Dr. Hardt, "about those two wolves. I read about them in last night's paper. The one, white—" He turned toward Pierre. "As was the case in your family, sir. The other, a smaller gray."

Trent's eyes were narrow.

"What's curious?" he demanded. "All it proves is that she—and, damn it! I won't believe it's she—picked up with some vagabond. Likely as not a renegade police dog."

Pierre's voice was subdued. "Heinrich said the gray was a wolf. And Messner said it was a wolf. And Nathan knows wolves. Fifty years ago he saw what were called the last Pennsylvania timber wolves and he says this—the gray—was identical."

Trent said angrily, "You're damned sure of yourself, Pierre."

Pierre said mildly, "Do you think *I* wanted to believe? I've been fighting this thing out with myself for the past twenty-four hours. I haven't slept. I know how you feel. With me, it was Sara. With you, so long as it was Sara, you could look at it halfway objectively. But with David. . ."

"You don't *know* it's David!"

DR. HARDT, contrary to his usual bombastic manner, waited patiently for this side argument to end. Now that there was a pause, he continued:

"What was curious was your Heinrich's con-

tention that he shot pointblank at close range and—didn't hit."

He hesitated, then added, "I say it is curious because the old accounts often mention the immunity of were-animals to bullets." He laughed heavily, with abrupt embarrassment. "I think you remember, I wrote a brochure on witchcraft once. If it proved anything, it showed I did a good bit of research on the subject. It was," he smiled grimly, "entirely derivative."

"And if I recall," Pierre said, "the reviewers thought your treatment hardly sympathetic."

Hardt appeared not to hear him.

"There are some odd tales," he resumed. He added hastily, "Don't take me wrong. I myself, sir, have not the slightest faith." Pierre thought the tone a bit too defensive. "In general it is said there are two types of werewolves. The one, selling his soul to the devil, receives as the highest reward for faithful service as a warlock the ability to shift his shape at will. And some of the stories tell how no ordinary attack upon the beast will prove effective."

Trent said with a quick sneer, "Ah. And yet you tell us, Pierre, this crazy yarn about Sara coming home with smashed fingers the night of that thing at Melton Crossing!"

Pierre replied with a voice now beginning to chill, "I only told you—because it was true."

Dr. Hardt bowed his head thoughtfully.

"Smashed? Swollen, I believe he said. No blood was there?"

"I didn't see any," Pierre said.

"It is said," Hardt explained, "that sometimes they are bloodless. It might check. Of course, in the other type, there are many reports of werewolves revealed for what they —I say, allegedly—were by the loss of a leg or an arm in conflict with a huntsman.

"Petronius tells how a soldier, turned werewolf, was wounded in the neck by a pike. When he resumed human form, he had a bad gash in the exact spot."

Trent interposed suspiciously, "What do you mean, other type?"

"The type," explained Hardt, "that does not sell its soul to the devil."

Trent began, "Then how can a person become—"

Then, guessing such a terrible answer as he did not wish to hear, he stopped abruptly. But Hardt said brutally, "Contagion."

"Personal contact?" inquired Pierre.

"That, sir, is the supposition. Frazier quotes the Toradja belief that a man is either born a werewolf or becomes one by mere contact. A bite would suffice; the human would be doomed."

"Forever?"

"In cases of contagion, I believe, the curse is supposed to last seven years, unless the spell is broken."

Pierre, who had been listening intently, asked, "But for the former type, Doctor?"

"Life."

And once more there was an uncomfortably long pause.

Trent pierced a cigar and lit it. He lit it with the elaborate automatic lighter which Pierre kept on his smoking stand—the butt end of an old flintlock pistol. He snapped the trigger, and the steel hammer struck flint and gave flame. Trent held it a moment, examining it with an obvious attempt at self-command. He said wearily:

"At least, we don't *know* that David. . ."

Pierre (and Dr. Hardt could see how the man was terrorized at the thought of being the only victim; how he clutched at each straw to draw someone, anyone, into his own horrible web) said:

"We don't *know*. But we surmise. I've good grounds to surmise. Sara told me how much she wanted David. And now—they're together."

If ever Trent felt like murder, he did now. He gripped the arms of his chair with his fists until his knuckles were drawn of blood. He glared at Pierre. And Dr. Hardt, whose lifelong study was the human mind, could see—even as he had deciphered Pierre—how eager Trent was to transfer his fear of the unknown to a hatred of something that was definitely flesh and blood. In mental turmoil he sought a scapegoat.

What Hardt did not know was that Manning Trent suddenly remembered David's return on a recent night from a nocturnal tramp. Ever solicitous for his son's welfare, he had observed that David's lower lip was split; it was stained with blood. His hands relaxed from the chair arms. And he held up his left, fingers outspread, and with the forefinger of his right began to count—back.

That was it! That was the night of Melton Crossing!

Had they met, then? He remembered kisses of his own youth.

Trent's head lowered and his hand stroked his hot forehead. After a time, from what seemed a long distance, he heard Hardt's voice:

"Those prints. Didn't I read where they led away from the Tilson child's body and disappeared at the creek edge?"

"You did," said Pierre.

"The reason I asked," said Hardt, "was that, so the stories go, the werewolf often changes his shape by rolling in water. A bap-

tism, in reverse, if you like. Is it true that your—ah, beast has been seen near the water each time?"

Pierre said, "Near by, usually. Seems to hug the watercourses."

"Perhaps," suggested Hardt, "for a quick change in order to avoid detection?"

The doctor spoke with a tolerant air. Pierre replied seriously:

"Perhaps."

"And were there not," pursued Hardt, "the prints of a human being across the stream from where the animal's tracks disappeared?"

"There were," Pierre said. "And now that you've brought that up. . ."

He rose heavily from his chair and turned once more to the study. The eyes of both men followed him—Trent's, bitterly; Dr. Hardt's, with curiosity. When he reappeared, Pierre held a shoe box. He placed it on the coffee stand.

"I went over there this morning," he said. "It's on the Waterman place, just across the highway. Those prints were still there, most of them in pretty bad shape because of the wet weather. But there was one—frozen. . ."

He held up a small plaster cast.

"I don't pretend," he said, "to be a detective. Still, heel and toe, here it is. And here—" he held up a woman's oxford—"is the shoe that matches. I took it—from Sara's closet."

Chapter Five

RETURNING home that night, Dr. Justin Hardt found himself in a strangely contradictory position. For the first time in his life he could not believe what his own eyes showed him.

Man of science, he had trained himself to believe nothing that was not proved by one or a combination of his five senses. Now, facing a critical test of this lifelong tenet, he had refused to accept his own criterion for truth.

The result was a gradual realization that the foundations upon which he had built his life were shaken. He was logical enough to admit that from the type of forceful personality that had regarded his own word as the final law, he might—possibly—be relegated to the class of an intellectually lazy agnostic who could only mouth:

"I do not know."

There was, moreover, another element in Dr. Hardt's personal problem. This was that some years before, purely out of curiosity, he had begun a study of witchcraft. He had penetrated the subject to some depth. He had accumulated a considerable library on magic, demonology and related matter.

In the light of what he knew, he could not drop the matter of Sara's lack of shadow by shrugging his huge round shoulders and observing that it was something beyond his knowledge.

Nor did the problem rest there. He might have felt much greater mental ease, despite what his eyes had shown him, had he been able to diagnose Sara's trouble. He hadn't. And he was honest about that.

Hardt was, in fact, so greatly troubled that when he finally reached his expensive rooms at the Racquet Club he removed from their shelves several books on the general subject of witchcraft. Then, robed and slippered and settled in his easy chair with the reading lamp adjusted at the exact angle, he began to thumb through them.

First troubling question to present itself was the fact of Sara's womanhood. He could not recall having heard of a female werewolf. Yet, when he had opened his copy of de Plancy's *Dictionnaire Infernal,* he discovered just such a case:

The year was 1588; the scene, the mountains of Auvergne. A friend of the husband of a woman who had shot off the right forepaw of a wolf and had kept the paw in a bag as a trophy. But when he opened the bag to exhibit his prize to the husband, to his horror he drew out a human hand. And on one finger was a ring which the husband recognized as his wife's.

There was that—and Hardt could not but remember Sara's swollen fingers and the story of Mary Heath.

On the surface, Dr. Hardt knew, there was a bond of sympathy between the so-called authenticated cases of werewolfery and insanity. In either instance, there was a dissatisfaction with self. Madness for the insane was release. So, with the warlock. There must be desires that can be satisfied in no other manner.

This, Dr. Hardt conceded, was reasonable. But he was still too skeptical to admit the possibility of winning the ability to satisfy a lust for blood by sale of one's soul to so improbable a character as Satan.

And here was another problem:

Was it not generally conceded that there could be no belief in metamorphosis into any particular animal in a locality where that animal had ceased to exist? Without the belief, what became of the alleged fact? And how long had it been since wolves were seen in this region?

The answer in this case, Dr. Hardt finally decided, would be the old curse on the family which—curses being taken at their face value—would not be expected to trouble itself too much about geography.

And then Dr. Hardt sat up!

"But, of course! There is the answer. Lycanthropy. Wolf madness."

He got up and walked back to his shelves and switched on a lamp.

"How long since I've heard of a case like that?"

It would be the reason, he knew—or, rather, theorized—that he hadn't recognized Sara's symptoms.

A natural form of insanity . rare nowadays . the patient became obsessed with the idea he was a wolf went barking about attacking people

"Yes. Here's that case. At Pavia, 1541."

It was the case of a lycanthrope who, when captured in human form, maintained he was a wolf none the less; with a single difference, that his fur grew within him. Curious, some of his captors opened wounds in the body to find out.

And still, when Dr. Hardt had pored for an hour over the symptoms which physicians long before his time had recorded, he was not satisfied. Not that the symptoms for what was known as lycanthropy did not, at some points, fit Sara. What struck him time after time was the fact of those animal prints beside the dead body of the Tilson child; the fact that men had seen a wolf.

He put down his books finally, strode into his dressing room.

"One thing certain. The girl must be placed in an institution. I will recommend commitment tomorrow."

The words bounced back.

He'd recommend!

And *what* would he recommend?

Good Lord! he could see the headlines:

FAMED PSYCHIATRIST OFFERS CASE OF LYCANTHROPY!

The thing would ruin him.

Well, then, he could say it was something else. Make out she was a manic-depressive. That would come about as close to it as anything.

But no. There would be the other doctors. *They* would know differently.

He considered the angles. And the more he mulled over each phase, the uglier under professional scrutiny his predicament became.

If there was an ounce of truth in the case, what an opportunity was presented to him—and his hands were tied!

PIERRE, after his guests departed, sat for a long time staring moodily into the dying fire. His mind clearing, he was inclined to disapprove of himself for overindulgence. Yet, drinking had given him a cushion for shock; and now that he had gained perspective, he would not need it any more.

He had particularly avoided meeting Sara immediately after his discovery the day previous. Indeed, he had been in no condition to dine. He had not seen her that day, save for the moment that evening when Trent and Hardt were present. He dreaded meeting her alone.

He dreaded it.

And yet he did not feel fear of her. Rather, he felt overwhelming pity. And that pity, he knew, was the substance of his love. He knew that now there was only one pressing question, and that everything else—his business, his zest for life, his companions—must give way before it. The question was: How was he to save Sara from herself?

Ah, but it wasn't possible she was beyond salvation. Was she woman or devil or some creature halfway between and still capable of being pulled in one direction or the other? If only a person knew!

Exorcism!

He would try it, of course—if he could find a priest to take on the task. He'd not the faith himself. But where find a priest?

He would leave the Church out just so long as he could.

Too, there was another problem: he must find some means to protect his neighbors. Hmm. That would be difficult—plenty difficult.

He was standing by the French doors, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes on the wood along the creek. Suddenly, he started. Something white down there. Something white, close to the ground, moving slowly. It disappeared.

He stared at the place. Shortly from a little to the left, two figures emerged from the wood. And when they approached the house, Pierre—his breath in short gasps—identified them.

A moment later he heard David say good night to Sara at the front door; heard the door open, heard retreating footfalls on the gravel. He heard the door close. Better permit her to go to her room. Didn't want to see her, anyhow. But he walked to the door and called her.

She entered quietly, yet with the listlessness with which she had left completely gone. Indeed, there was a certain vibrancy in her step; a flush in her lips; an actual bloom on her cheeks.

"God knows what she's been doing!" Pierre thought. He could not keep his eyes from the floor where no shadow fell. He thought,

"Maybe she doesn't know." He said, then:

"Hello, pet. Have a nice walk?"

She said, "Why . . . I suppose so."

"Thought I heard David out there."

"Yes. Yes, you did."

"Where did you go?"

She glanced down at her hands, thoughtfully. Her brows were drawn in wonder.

"Why, really, I don't—quite remember."

Pierre's heart leaped. Thank God; thank God! She still doesn't know."

* * *

Manning Trent, too, remained up long after he reached home. But he was in no condition to sit in one place and think things through. He paced his study, then prowled about the house restlessly.

Julia was in bed. Good. He probably looked like a ghost—if he looked the way he felt.

David was still out. Dammit. Didn't used to stay out so late. He looked at his watch. One o'clock. Even love should have some limits.

He switched on a light in the long dining room and removed the stopper from a decanter. He poured himself a drink, held the glass to the light and watched the lambent amber. Then he put the drink down.

Might just have been the trouble over there, he thought. Might have been one drink too many plus suggestion. Pierre certainly had *his* fill. Himself, he'd stay off—till Dave came in, anyway. He started prowling about the house again.

He'd talk it over with David. Utter rot, of course. He'd get David to stay away from her. She was mad. And that was that. Otherwise Hardt wouldn't be about. No matter how much you like a man, you couldn't have your son marrying his daughter if she were a raving lunatic. He'd talk to Dave.

He was in the drawing room, off the main hall, when he heard David come in.

"That you, David?"

"Hello, Dad. Still up? Want something?"

He entered the room, big, comfortable looking, hatless, his white hair tousled. Trent gazed at him wih admiring fondness. But then, as if drawn by some power beyond himself, his eyes lowered—to the hands—to the knees—to the feet—and there, on the floor, they sought for something they could not find.

"No, David. I didn't want anything."

WHILE this was happening, wiry Red Crane, crack photographer of Trent's *Herald,* leaned on the bar at the Well and sipped a Scotch and soda.

There were other newspapermen in the room—reporters and photographers from the New York and Philadelphia papers. They sat at the rickety tables, lounged over the bar. A pin-ball machine maintained a chatter of steel balls against pegs and ringing bells.

The usually placid, low-voiced John Craven, busier behind the bar than he had been in years, appeared somewhat flushed and excited by the sudden fame cast upon his establishment. He said:

"Ye-ss—ye-ss."

Just as he always had. But there was sometimes a catch in his breath.

The pay-station phone on the wall rang, and Painter of the *Times,* the most fastidiously dressed man of the lot, took down the receiver.

Then he turned to the room at large:

"*Mirror's* calling Doyle. Anybody seen Doyle?"

Doyle, in extravagant slow motion, detached himself from his beer and ambled to the phone.

"Yeh . . Uh huh Uh huh Uh huh . . Okay."

When he returned to the bar he loosed an oath.

"Calling me in, dammit. Claim the yarn's washed up."

Somebody consoled, "What the hell! Don't wanta die down here, do you?"

"Half-baked idea in the first place," another said.

"Nice while it lasted," Doyle observed. "Overtime'll pay my drinks for a month."

Allan Kane, photographer for the *Herald-Tribune,* lunged through the swinging doors, black leather camera case swung over his shoulder. He approached the bar.

"Hi, Red."

Tom Summers, *Herald* reporter, came in from the night. Sleepy-eyed, he took the place at the bar Kane vacated. He ordered a beer and stood looking at it. He said quietly:

"Gonna try again tonight, Red?"

Red Crane nodded.

"When?"

Crane held the underside of his left wrist up and glanced at his watch.

"Ten minutes or so."

"I need sleep," groused Summers.

"Don't I?" retorted Crane. Then, "No kiddin', I think we got something. I was down there again this afternoon. Fresh tracks, right along the bank. Comin'?"

Summers said, "I suppose. But if we have to wait up all the damned night again, I'm bringing a bottle. We'd better leave separately. These mugs'd spike your tires if they figured we were pulling a fast one."

Summers drank up and left. A few minutes later Crane picked up his case, hung it on his shoulder and followed.

It was nine-thirty when Summers and Red Crane parked their car in a seldom-used lane in the woods west of the State Highway. Summers said:

"Boss's land, isn't it?"

"Trent's?" Crane's laugh was short. "I dunno. His place is over in that direction." He nodded to the east. "That perfume feller lives over there. South, I guess it is."

Both would have been surprised to know that, at that moment, Manning Trent, who paid their salaries each and every Friday, was in earnest conversation with not only "that perfume feller" but with one of Philadelphia's leading psychiatrists. And they would have been thunderstruck by the nature of the conversation.

They started down a path through the woods, Summers' flashlight picking out the way. It was downhill—down toward the Neshaminy.

The night previous they had hidden out near the confluence of the Neshaminy and the Bowling, where the body of Leroy Tilson was found. And the night before that they had camped even farther down the Neshaminy. But tonight:

"I'll show you where we went wrong," Crane said. "We were right in our first idea. This damned wolf or whatever it is keeps pretty close to the creek. The Tilson case proved that. So does the dead goat and the case up at Melton Crossing. But this afternoon I found. . ."

He took the flashlight from Summers and led the way down a steep gravel incline.

"Here's the creek now."

Reporter and photographer emerged into a small canyon.

"Hell!" spat Summers. "I know this place. It's where Derhammer and Messner took a shot at it."

"Over that way," Crane amended, motioning upstream. "Well, do you see?"

"Hell, no."

"Look, Tom. If this thing wanders up and downstream and if it keeps close to the creek, it's got to come through this canyon. And if—"

"Check."

For the next few minutes, Crane busied himself with his case. He opened his camera and adjusted the lens. He inserted a bulb and checked the plate. He found a rocky ledge between two bushes several feet above the creek, affording a view both up and downstream. Then the two men made themselves comfortable and sat down to wait.

Fifteen minutes dragged by. Then, more slowly, thirty. Summers drew out a bottle, unscrewed the top and silently handed it to Crane. Crane drank. And Summers drank. And Summers put the bottle away and started to light a cigarette.

"...use it," Crane whispered. "Animals can smell a mile off."

"He'll smell us, anyway," Summers said.

"That's so. Where's the wind?"

They checked the direction of the breeze, found it from the north.

"That's okay," Crane decided. "Can't smell us up or downstream."

They waited. It was an hour now. An hour and a half. The canyon was dark, forbidding. Scrub pine on the shoulders of the canyon cast shadows on the creek and screened the starlit sky. The water below them gurgled quietly.

"This where you saw those fresh prints?" Summers whispered.

"Yeh."

They waited. An owl somewhere above screeched with startled suddenness. A rabbit scrambled through the dry leaves somewhere below.

Two hours.

Downstream, at Fountain Head, Dr. Justin Hardt was preparing to leave. Shortly, Manning Trent would return home, his mind troubled. And Pierre would sit in front of his log fire and stare.

Two hours and fifteen minutes. Upstream two miles was the Lamberton Farm.

Two hours and a half had passed when Summers clutched Crane's arm. They listened breathlessly.

There. . There it was again:

Plump, plump, plump—the faint padding of footsteps on moist earth.

Crane crouched, camera in hand, eyes on the creek below and the narrow path on the other side, meagerly illuminated between the splotches of black shadows by starlight. A dry twig cracked under Crane's feet, sounding to his tense ears like a blast of dynamite.

"Easy, Red."

The sound neared; stopped (and both men visualized the quarry pausing to sniff suspiciously); then the sound grew more distinct.

Pad, pad, pad.

At the canyon mouth now, Summers figured; where Heinrich and Messner had seen them.

There was rhythm in the sound; *pad-plump, pad-plump, pad-plump.*

And then—

With their own eyes, and simultaneously, they saw the long, low, moving shadows. Summers thought:

"Two! Derhammer's right."

He nudged Crane.

One appeared larger and whiter, Summers thought. And that would check. Crane steeled himself. He crouched, sighted. A hundred thoughts sped dizzily: would the bulb have enough penetration: little far, there; black, too black; speed right? Damn it! Need the telescopic. Gosh! If I pull this off.

Summers, behind Crane, saw the slow leisurely approach. The beasts trotted as if tired. *Pad-plump.* They were more distinct now. They resolved into form. But they were still shadows. Why didn't Crane shoot?

Now they were directly in front of them. In a belt of starlight.

Flash!

Summers received a split-second impression of a huge, sleek white beast etched against the far rocks; of a red stain about the nose; of a darker animal drawing up the rear.

"Got it!" Crane shouted.

In the black oblivion that followed they heard a crashing from below; sounds receding, racing away.

THE next day Manning Trent did not go into the city. He breakfasted late—too late, purposely, to face David over the table. His eyes wore the telltale look of a sleepless night.

Julia, too, was up before Trent came down. From the open bay window in the cheerfully curtained breakfast room, Manning saw her long, low limousine—Roger at the wheel—roll out of the grounds and creep along the State Highway. Julia, a lady settled in her ways, never permitted Roger to drive more than twenty-five miles an hour.

"You are driving too rapidly, Roger," she would announce with asperity into the microphone which linked her glass-encased tonneau to Roger's seat. Or again:

"Somewhat more slowly, Roger."

She had installed, in the rear, a separate speedometer. And the result was that Julia Trent crept wherever she went—and traffic crept behind her.

As the spotless black limousine disappeared at its discreet pace behind a hill, Trent was relieved. He just couldn't, today, stand up to her prying inquiries.

"You did not sleep well last night, Manning?"

"Do you feel, Manning, that the—ah—alcohol may have occassioned your restlessness?"

The tightness in the throat, the slight giddiness, the aching of neck and shoulder muscles so well known to the insomniac gripped Trent. Nor did he more than look at his food.

Have to work this out, he thought. No sleep. Can't think straight. But—have to work this out.

He sat, and his coffee grew cold. He stared out across the lawn, still green even in December. He stared beyond the lawn to his fields and woods, to tree-studded Mt. Neshaminy. Above the crowns of the trees and somewhat to the east of that tall hill, the copper work on a chimney pot glistened in the sun. Fountain Head. Unreasoning bitterness grew within him.

He felt angry with Pierre, with Sara, with Dr. Hardt, with everything and anything connected with Fountain Head. The entire landscape in that direction repelled him. Hadn't there been enough trouble at Trent Farms without borrowing from the neighbors? Wasn't the change in Julia's character through the years sufficient damnation? And David's long, long invalidism?

He speculated. Had David's illness left some weakness which paved the way to greater susceptibility to this—this horror?

Midway in his thought he shook himself—physically and abruptly. Good God! He was going on as if he believed this nonsense! In the plain light of the new day, he knew for certain that the events of the preceding night were only a passing madness.

Violently, he pushed back his chair to leave the table. The sound brought Wallace, the butler, into evidence. As he turned to leave. Wallace said with his usual stiff politeness:

"It was too bad, sir, about the Lamberton girl."

Trent stopped, turned. Wallace was already bending rigidly over the table to remove the dishes. Trent asked gruffly:

"What do you mean?"

Wallace, straightening, faced his employer.

"I am sorry, sir. I thought you knew. It was Elsie. She is the youngest, I am told; six years, I believe they said. She was found this morning in the woods back of their place. She was quite badly mangled, sir."

Dully, Trent stared at Wallace—Wallace, whose poker face would greet Doomsday without a wrinkle of emotion. Finally Trent asked:

"Dead?"

"Oh, quite, sir."

Trent's shoulders slumped. He knew the child's mother, Jennie Lamberton; prettiest girl in the township when he was a youngster. A misty recollection of a dance clouded thought for an instant; a summer romance; and then her marriage to Howard Lamberton, and her inheritance of her father's great farm on Pumpernickle Road. Trent began hesitantly:

"Was it—"

"The wolf? That is what they say, sir. But they say there were two of them, sir."

There was just enough trace of the histrionic in Wallace's pauses between sentences, just enough emphasis upon the numeral to give Trent thought. He looked narrowly in Wallace's face; he wondered if the man were not regarding him with a little too much interest.

"Somewhat," continued Wallace, "like the Heath case at Melton Crossing, sir. Elsie was asleep on the first floor and the window was up a little. Rather warm for December, you know, sir. But you would think, sir, that with this going on, people would close their windows. I understand the State Police have warned—"

Trent, still thinking of Wallace's sharp glance, interrupted impatiently, "What are they saying?"

"The police, sir?"

"People."

"Why, sir, I would not put any trust in gossip. You know how the talk goes on backstairs."

"Am I expected to?" Trent inquired dryly.

"I am sorry, sir. I did not mean to imply—"

"What are they saying?" Trent repeated.

"Really, sir, it is rather difficult to piece together. But since the experience of Heinrich Derhammer and Nathan Messner—perhaps I should say, sir, their alleged experience—people say that the things are—well, inhuman, sir."

"So are dogs."

Wallace bowed slightly.

"Of course, sir. But if you will pardon me, I intended to convey the reverse of what I said. They give the beasts human attributes."

"Bosh!"

"Exactly, sir."

And Wallace turned to the clearing of the table.

TOM SUMMERS, at Trent's order, drove from the village to Trent Farms. He had cleaned up most of the news angles of Elsie Lamberton's death. What with the night before, he was dead tired. He leaned back in a huge chair in Trent's library and faced his employer.

"Two sets of tracks?" asked Trent.

"That's right, but what you ought to know—" He was about to describe the adture of himself and Crane. But Trent broke in:

"I don't want details. What's the talk?"

Summers lit a cigarette.

"The talk? Around the village?" He laughed shortly. "It's a throwback to the Middle Ages. They're talking werewolves, Mr. Trent."

Trent simulated surprise.

"Rot!" he said.

"You can't tell the villagers that," Summers said. "And they think they've a couple of pretty good reasons. Derhammer's story is one."

"I don't trust Heinrich."

"But that isn't the whole thing, Mr. Trent. These neighbors of yours are pretty shrewd. They aren't forgetting that after the Tilson boy was killed, the troopers traced the animal to one creek bank—and found on the other side the prints of a woman's shoes."

Trent wrinkled his nose.

"There's a natural enough explanation somewhere, Mr. Trent. I've good reason to believe they *are* wolves. But you can't tell these people that. They keep saying there haven't been any wolves in Pennsylvania for fifty years. And the troopers checked with that fellow, McFanahan, up in the Poconos. And he claims he hasn't lost a single pup."

"So people say, 'No wolves.' And they say, 'If there aren't any wolves about, but if we've got something that *looks* like wolves, why—there you are!' "

Summers leaned forward.

"I don't mean they actually say it. They talk in and around it. But you get a blazing clear idea of what they mean—and it's pretty ugly, too. Good God, Mr. Trent! The way their temper's up. I'd hate to be in the shoes of anyone they suspect!"

Trent glanced up sharply. Summers thought he paled. And such was the chill of this suggestion that, at first, Trent was deaf to the importance of Summers' next words. Something about "another beat by Red Crane." About a picture. Only the professional excitement in Summers' tone stirred Trent from his horrendous contemplation.

"I was with him, Mr. Trent," Summers was saying eagerly. "Right out back of your place. We'd waited in different places three nights. They came along last night. And there *were* two. I saw them."

Trent leaned forward.

"Wolves?" he asked incredulously.

"They looked like wolves to me."

Trent's hand went to his forehead.

"Crane got the picture?"

"Yes, sir."

Relief, sudden and welcome, enveloped Trent. Why—that would solve everything.

"Thank the Lord!" he exclaimed fervently.

Tom Summers was puzzled.

"Best beat Crane's had," he said.

Trent took hold of himself.

"Where's Crane now?" he demanded.

"He stayed at the inn last night," Summers said. "It was too late to make edition after we reached the village. He left about half an hour ago for town, after getting the Lamberton pictures. He wants to develop that plate himself."

"I want a print," Trent ordered. "Have a boy bring one out. Right away."

* * *

It was a more composed Pierre who that afternoon tramped over to Trent Farms under the winter sun. His tread was still heavy and slow, but it possessed purpose. And when he met David in the south pasture, he could greet him with some semblance of cheer.

They chatted a few minutes. Once Pierre glanced at the ground and knew that his suspicions, as far as David was concerned, were justified.

David appeared unhappy. He appeared nervous. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other. As much to fabricate conversation as anything, Pierre asked about the Ayrshires. David's reply was distant. And it was a curious reply.

"The Ayrshires? I don't know. Thinking it over today. Think I'll get rid of them. I never did like cattle."

Pierre glanced at him sharply.

"Why—" he began. Why. ."

And then he understood.

Trent said, when Pierre had seated himself in Manning's library, "All right. I saw it—when David came home last night. I mean, that it wasn't there. And I still don't believe it wasn't there."

"I'm not going to argue," Pierre said.

"And besides," said Trent, selecting a cigar from the humidor, "one of my lads got a picture of these animals last night. Back in the canyon. I'm waiting for the print now."

"Which proves—"

"I don't know what it'll prove. Dog, wolf or anything, it'll give us something to go on—and might prove an alibi."

Pierre shook his head.

"I just saw David. Manning, he *doesn't* have it. Don't you believe your own senses?"

Trent said roughly, "No. But I believe photographs. And this one will show nothing but two animals."

Pierre was silent. Then:

"I'm not going to argue. We're faced with something where argument doesn't help. You can shout your head off that something can't happen. But when it happens, words lose their meaning and you have to figure out what to do."

"I don't follow."

"You will. I'm thinking about their souls." He paused. "Have you?"

"No."

"I didn't think so. I didn't, either. A soul's never meant anything to me. Until I saw the change in Sara. And then I discovered that when you lose that, you lose everything."

"Are you sure," Trent asked, "that it is soul?"

Pierre shrugged.

"Call it anything. Character, personality, spirit. But it's something so vitally a part of you that when it changes or goes away, you change, too. It's like reason. Has any scientist ever seen, weighed, touched reason? Of course not. But when it goes, it leaves a person mad."

Trent bit viciously at his cigar.

"Damn it! I wish you'd stop talking like this. When that picture comes. . "

He got up and began pacing the floor.

"Manning, look here!" Pierre implored. "We're friends. That's why I can't help talking like this. Whatever this picture shows, it won't help Sara. That's what is driving me crazy. She's changed so terribly." He added slowly, "And so has David. Did you know he wants to get rid of his Ayrshires?"

Trent, at the other end of the room, turned abruptly.

"What's that? He loves those cattle!"

Pierre nodded.

"That," he said, "is what is so terrible." He added with apparent irrelevance, "Heinrich was telling me this morning how milk production is dropping."

Trent thought that over.

"Always does this time of year."

"That's what I told Heinrich. And he said that Buttercup Dairy's cattle hadn't produced a quart for the last week."

"I've said it before," Manning growled, "and I say it again: I don't trust Heinrich."

"I didn't either." Pierre sighed. "So I called Jason at Buttercup. It's true."

Trent passed his handkerchief across his hot forehead and sat down again.

"I know what you mean," he said finally. "That werewolves, witches, vampires go for cattle. Well?"

"And perhaps bear an antipathy for them?"

Trent frowned.

"Eh? Oh, you mean David. That *is* queer, his change."

"I won't argue," Pierre said. "I'm only interested in two things: souls—and little kids like Elsie Lamberton. I said it last night. I say it again. I'm convinced Sara's soul is gone. I'm convinced she is possessed. And that means we must give it back to her."

Trent's jaw was set.

"And—David?"

"I WOULDN'T know," Pierre said. He added, with calculation: "I should think that a person would have to believe in a malady before setting out to cure it."

"You're bitter, Pierre."

"I'm bitter. And I don't know—and I doubt the Church knows—if the soul is lost when the change occurs through contagion. But the job's cut out. We've got to make those youngsters well again."

"I was reading," Manning said, and his voice was tired and his words were slow, "the theory of werewolfery. I was reading here in the encyclopedia this afternoon. Remy and Guazzo and some others claim the metamorphosis is only true in appearance, but not in essential fact; that the appearance is caused only by a glamour created by Satan. If that is true, it's nothing but an illusion on the spectator's part. Which is—madness. Which isn't to be worried about."

Pierre's nod was slow and heavy.

"I've heard that theory. The alternative is that the Devil himself created an actual change. That there is no glamour. If that's true, and if we make no attempt to save Sara, her soul will be damned." He paused. "Do we dare take the chance that Remy is right? No, I can't see it."

Manning tapped the arm of his chair nervously.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going," said Pierre slowly, "to lock Sara in her room every night. We can't do anything else. Hardt refuses to have her committed. Won't touch the case. Well—I'm just as glad. She'll be home—and, maybe, I can do something."

Trent's eyes narrowed.

Pierre nodded.

"Exorcism."

"I should think, Manning, you'd be as interested in that as I. Manning, we *can't* let those two continue prowling. We *can't,* morally, permit any more. . ."

Trent got up again. He walked to a window. He walked across the room. He returned to the window, which afforded a view of the state highway. He looked at his watch.

"Three o'clock," he said. "That print should have been up an hour ago."

He called the *Herald,* asked for the art department; and when he had that connection, he asked for Red Crane.

"Went out at noon, Mr. Trent," said the voice. "Hasn't returned."

Trent explained carefully.

"That's right, Mr. Trent. He *was* in the dark room. I think he *was* developing. What happened to the picture I don't know. Will you hold on while I look or shall I call you?"

Trent held on. Finally:

"Mr. Trent? Nothing in his tank. Nothing on his rack except the Lamberton pictures. No picture of wolves, Mr. Trent. Canyon background? No. No picture like that."

Trent swore.

"Switch me to Mr. Morrison, please," he ordered. And in a moment he was talking to his managing editor. Again he explained carefully.

"Find Crane," he commanded. "Take a dozen men if you have to. Try all the hangouts. I *must* have that picture. And bring Crane out!"

* * *

They found Red Crane in a Broad Street bar often and happily frequented by *Herald* men. He was drunk. He sat at a table and fingered a negative. He kept holding it up to the light. In front of him lay the print, stained with whiskey.

They bundled him into a car. They drove at top speed.

"Whazallabout?" he kept asking dazedly. Ray Holt sat beside him, rubbing his neck and back.

"Snap out of it, Red. The boss wants ya."

"Whazallabout? Fire me?"

"Hell, no. Some picture you took last night."

"Ugh. . . Then, with dim comprehension: "Wolf pishur." And he began laughing hysterically.

Holt and the others didn't know what it was all about. Boss got a crazy idea. They hopped. He was the boss. It took an hour and five minutes to reach Trent Farms, half of it through thick traffic. When they drove between the high stone pillars from the state highway, Crane was in slightly better shape.

Trent himself met the party at the door.

"I'll see Crane alone," he said. He led him into the library where Pierre was still seated. When he realized the photographer's condition, he poured him a drink—with much water and a little whiskey. Crane gulped it.

"You took a picture last night, Red."

" 'Sright. Summers tell you?"

"I talked with him this morning."

Crane sat limply. He stared at the carpet.

"Tellaboutwolf?" he asked, without looking up.

"He did."

Crane began to laugh crazily. The laugh ended with a brief sob. He began fumbling in his pockets.

"Saw wolf," he said. "Swear saw wolf. So Summers. Waited. Saw wolf. Two wolf."

Still he fumbled in his pockets.

"Thiz it," he said, and produced the print.

Trent snatched at it. Pierre looked over his shoulder. Both men gasped.

It was a flashlight photograph, against a background of overhanging rocks, of Sara and David!

THEY were finished with theory, with argument. They did not even attempt to explain the magic of the photograph. Trent surrendered with obvious horror.

"I'll go along," he said. And he said, "Good God! What else can I do?"

But even as he said this, Pierre insensibly felt that Trent was drawing mental reservations; that he still sought somewhere a naturalistic key.

Pierre had this feeling when Trent answered his question:

"What about this fellow Crane?"

"Won't *dare* talk," Trent said. "That's why he got drunk. People would think he was crazy."

"But if Summers confirmed it?"

"He'd be just as crazy. And besides," Trent added slowly, "I don't thing they want to lose their jobs."

And again Pierre had the feeling when Trent said:

"We'll have to keep them apart, of course. Seems that's when they're at their worst. That's why I can't see any reason for locking up David, as long as Sara is locked up. He'll do nothing without her."

Pierre said, "That's your responsibility. But if he's running loose, and somebody notices. . ."

"Lord! Do you think anyone has already?"

Pierre asked, "How would I know? It gets worse all the time. There's so damn many angles. We'll have to go slow. We'll have to be cautious with our inquiries. Hardt may help—and he'll keep his mouth shut. I hate to think what would happen if the people around here found out—that is, if they're anything like Freda and Heinrich."

Trent agreed. It was substantially what Summers had said.

"That's something," he said. "Freda and Heinrich. If *they* found out—"

Pierre bit his nether lip.

"I'll see you," he said. And he got up and left.

* * *

When he returned to Fountain Head, Sara was sitting in the library. She wore a velvet dress of rich deep emerald. It accentuated the curves of her body, gave her animal grace to a startling degree.

A magazine lay in her lap, but she did not look at it. She stared pensively, instead, out of the window. Shafts of dull yellow light from the lowering sun streamed through the window and fell on Sara. From the door, Pierre regarded her.

Waiting for the sun to go down, he thought miserably. She must spend her days waiting for that.

But tonight, he thought, would do her little good.

He entered the library and sat down. She did not look up. He stirred the log in the fireplace, and then he looked long and steadily toward her. He shook his head. He glanced down at his shadow. He thought, You never trouble about them. You take them for granted. Like air. They're part of you. But when they're gone, what a ghastly difference!

The evening paper had arrived. He picked it up and read. He read about the murder of Elsie Lamberton.

Dinner, by candlelight, found Sara's pensiveness gone. Pierre could see the animation rise in her. She smiled. Her eyes glistened. There was anticipation in her eyes.

Once, Pierre observed, she reached out and pushed a silver candelabrum farther from her. She reached hesitantly, as if she could not quite make up her mind; as if, Pierre considered, she feared the flame. Changes such as that, such trifling changes, in Sara's mannerisms and habits and character, gave Pierre his greatest fear.

She talked little; then, only in answer to his questioning:

"Do anything this afternoon, dear?"

"No." She thought it over. "No. I just read."

And again.

"I saw David today. He wants to sell his Ayrshires."

Sara said tonelessly, "Oh."

The candle flames cast long, thin, swaying shadows. Pierre studied the candelabra, as rearranged by Sara. He studied the angles. He wondered if Sara had moved the one to reduce suspicion. He decided not when Sara's glance fell upon her hand and she seemed to study it without comprehension.

Her hand, slender and white, held a fork. The shadow of the fork lay on the damask tablecloth; but only the shadow of the fork, as if it were suspended without support. Pierre breathed:

"Dear God!"

She glanced from time to time, and with an air of expectancy, out of the great windows toward the lane. That was the route David would take—if he came. *She* knew he would

come. But Pierre wondered what measures of restraint Trent would take.

The telephone rang. Freda materialized. She plugged an extension into the wall and placed the instrument before Sara. She pursed her lips and she wrinkled her bulbous nose. Her own thoughts would have said, "Such things newfangled I trust not."

Sara lifted the receiver, heard the click as Heinrich, in the kitchen, replaced the other. She said:

"Hello."

The word was alive, it was music to Pierre's ears.

She listened then. But when she spoke again, the music was gone. The tone was sodden.

"All right," she said.

Freda re-entered and removed the telephone and began taking away the dinner plates. When Sara said nothing, Pierre inquired:

"David?"

"Yes."

"Is he coming over?"

"No." She paused a long time. Then: "He said something—about Mr. Trent making other plans—in the city."

The colorlessness of her words was reflected, Pierre now noticed, in her lips. He thought, Ah. David must still have a chance. David is still not beyond control. Well, how would Sara react? He pulled out his watch. He said:

"Still quite early. Cornell's at the Forrest. Shall we drive into town and see her show?"

Sara said. "No."

Pierre had not been optimistic. Neither had he expected an answer so abrupt. He said:

"I really wanted to see her. But it's not much fun going alone."

That approach might sway her, he thought. But she only took longer in making a reply.

"I don't believe so. I—simply can't stand the city."

Freda had cleared the table. She had placed the desserts before father and daughter; had poured the coffee. She said simply:

"I go now."

At the door to the pantry she hesitated and looked lingeringly in Sara's direction and then down at the plate she held—Sara's, which Sara had scarcely touched.

FREDA'S words reminded Pierre that tonight, Saturday, was the Derhammers' night off. He was relieved. It simplified things so. For once in his life he was glad he did not maintain a larger domestic staff. Trent there: cook, butler, maid, chauffeur; yes, and David's hired hands.

At last Sara excused herself. Pierre heard her slowly climbing the stairs. He pushed his chair back, walked to the sideboard and poured himself a brandy. And then he, too, went to the hall and climbed the stairs.

The door to Sara's room stood slightly ajar. He heard water running in her bathroom. He passed on to his own expansive room at the front of the house and stood in the dark by the window. After a little he saw the station wagon bounce along the gravel lane; Freda and Heinrich off for their night out.

Pierre could almost chart their course; a visit to a rathskeller, a pause at the German Culture Club, a visit to one of the dozen-odd cousins where they would spend the night.

He saw the red tail-light flicker and die out. His fists tightened. He walked out of the room.

He hated this more than anything he had ever done in his life. As he reached into his pocket, the steel of the key chilled his fingers. He drew out the key.

Sara's door was still ajar. He closed it quietly. He inserted the key in the lock. And he turned the key. Then he walked back to his room and sat down. He waited.

At last, from the hallway, he heard a door knob turn. He steeled himself. This was it, he thought. He wondered, in the second that followed, if—actually—he would meet the test. When she called, when she pleaded, when she wept, would he maintain his purpose or would he surrender?

Here it came! The tug at the door. Another. A concerned pause. Then there followed a series of impatient struggles with the knob, movement translated by the sound of scraping and scratching.

There was another silence: Sara, probably, looking for her key. He could hear her moving quietly about the room. He heard drawers open and close. Then, another silence—a long, long silence.

Pierre waited for the sound of her voice. It never came.

He arose and moved through the darkness to a window that looked down upon the porch roof. From farther back along the house one of Sara's windows threw an oblong of yellow light upon the lawn. He looked at it a long time. He thought:

"I can stand anything but this."

He thought:

"I had no idea it would be like this."

He had been ready for anything; anything—except silent surrender.

At last he went downstairs.

He spent the evening in his study. It was directly under Sara's room. From time to time, he could hear Sara moving about above

him. She must realize, he thought. And then he remembered how, only last night, she was not certain where she had been. Perhaps, he thought, she only dimly knows that something is wrong. Perhaps that is the reason for her apathy.

"But that's animal-like!" he exploded aloud. And then he stood staring at nothing among the echoes of his own words.

He sat down at the long table. He took a pencil and a sheet of paper from a drawer. Have to be businesslike, he thought. Have to figure all the angles.

He got up restlessly and opened a window. A chill breeze blew in upon him. The night was cold and fine. The breeze blew his paper from the table. He recovered the paper. He sat down again.

Let's see: have to get rid of the Derhammers. Hmm. There's a problem, the biggest problem. He'd have to keep house for himself.

The business? And right before Christmas, too.

Well, he hadn't been training young Webster for nothing. He'd call him Monday and tell him he wasn't coming in for a week or two. Perhaps longer. Webster would know what to do.

It would look funny, he thought, discharging the Derhammers. Especially, when he wasn't closing up the house. If he closed up the house, that would be all right. Well, have to face that one.

And how about when nobody saw Sara? He could answer that with a cruise. South America? That ought to take long enough.

God! Had no idea there'd be so many complications. What about the livestock? Sell it? No. Better idea.

Item by item, he listed the problems. Problem by problem, he solved them as best he could.

Meals? He'd have to feed her. Not that she'd been eating much lately. Well, he knew the reason for that—now. The very thought sped a shudder down his spine.

Chapter Six

MANNING and David, father and son, flowed with the crowd at midnight out of the Forrest Theater. Trent said, with forced cheer:

"Well, David? Still like Cornell as well as ever?"

David's voice was flat.

"Well enough."

Their limousine rolled to a stop in front of the theater. They rode west on Walnut Street.

"Lovely night," Trent said.

David did not reply.

"How about a drink and a bite?" Manning said. David agreed listlessly.

They rode in silence. Neon signs—ruby and emerald and sapphire and amethyst—spread a carnival of color upon the streets. When they reached Broad Street, the crowds grew heavier and David withdrew farther into himself.

People . Streets . . . Pavements Buildings . Steel . Lights Traffic . . .

He had alwyays preferred the open country. And now, on this first visit to the city since that strange passionate night with Sara, he found the scene almost unbearable. He would never return, he told himself, never.

Manning Trent could not have chosen worse for David's mood. He led David to the Club Ambassador—raucous, gaudy, gilt and velvet magnet for debutantes (and their titled escorts), married-but-tired males, and anyone else who could afford seventy-five cents per drink.

There was a little show upon a postage-stamp dance floor; the usual hefty soprano; the acrobatic Argentino dance team; the shapely young lady with almost nothing on at all except an accordion.

They found a table near the band. The band blared in David's left ear. The bedlam talk of the half-soused crowd around the horseshoes bar pounded on David's right.

The headwaiter, Karnes, a former waiter at the Bankers and Manufacturers, saw Trent and approached. Shortly, following a side conversation with Karnes, two pretty young girls descended upon their table.

It was, to say the least, not an outstanding success. Trent bought a round of drinks. And then another. David scarcely touched his first; failed to open his mouth. Chilled, the girls finally left. Manning thought:

"Lord! If I were a young fellow with David's money. . ."

He thought, in passing, of Julia.

There was too much noise for conversation. But later, as Roger drove them home (with special instructions to take them the long way through Fairmount Park), Manning, bearing in mind his talk with Pierre, asked:

"How are the Ayrshires coming, David?"

David was running down the window on his side. He was putting his face as close as he could do it.

Somehow, the night air in the park made him feel infinitely better.

"Why," he said. "Why—I found a buyer for them this afternoon. Renshaw up at New Hope."

Trent could scarcely believe his ears.

"You're actually selling them?"

"Why—yes."

"Trying another breed, of course?" Manning asked hopefully.

"Why—no. No. I don't think so. You see—" David searched desperately for words. "Really, I don't care much for cattle."

Trent, baffled, tried again.

"But you always did, David. You always did. Especially these Ayrshires."

David shook his head slowly.

"No. I don't think so. I don't—remember."

Manning slumped back in his seat. Good God! He pulled a gold cigar case from his coat pocket; snapped it open, selected a corona. He bit at the end with the cigar smoker's ceremony; he pressed it gently from end to end to make it draw. He lit it.

In the flare of the match light, Manning saw that David looked very pale. He asked:

"What are you reinvesting the money in?"

David looked puzzled.

"What money?"

"The money from the cattle."

"Oh. Oh—I don't know. Hadn't thought."

"Goats?"

Absently David shook his head.

"No-o. No goats. I think I'll sell what I have."

Manning leaned forward. He tapped David sharply on the knee.

"Look here, Dave. You were always pretty sickly as a youngster. Damned sickly. And when you grew older, well, somehow, you never got around very much. Maybe I'm as much at fault as anything, letting you do what you wanted with the farms. Look here; how does a trip sound?"

Dave did not reply.

"I mean a *trip!*" Trent emphasized. "Months of travel. Go to South America. And after that, what's wrong with Hawaii? And Japan? India, Australia?"

He paused, to let it sink in. And then he thought of Julia.

"By George," Trent said, "I'll go with you, too."

But David shook his head. And he said with rising inflection:

"No." He repeated it with conviction: "No. All I want to do is to be left alone. Left alone! Hear me? I don't want anything —just to be left alone!"

MEANWHILE Freda sat on the edge of one of the two straight-backed chairs in Pierre's study. Heinrich sat on the edge of the other. Both stared, blank-faced, at Pierre who sat behind the long table.

It was difficult to tell which of the three was the most uncomfortable. Certainly Pierre knew that the interview was not going well.

"You'll like it," he said. He tried to inject zest into his statement. "You deserve it. It'll be your home, your own home."

There was an embarrassing silence. Pierre added hastily:

"I've been wanting to do something like this for you for a long time. I don't like to call it a pension. I just want to show my appreciation for your working here so long. The livestock here. Well, that's yours, Heinrich."

Heinrich blinked.

"After all," Pierre said, "you've raised that stock, Heinrich. You've done all the work." He tried to appear jocose. "Good Communist practice, I believe, gives the worker the benefit of his own production."

Freda looked questioningly at Heinrich. Heinrich began, awkwardly, voicing the sentiments of both.

"We make out it's nice," he faltered. "But we make out we've growed this place too. We make out we ain't no more young, Mr. Pierre." His tongue stumbled to a halt. He looked appealingly toward Freda. She said:

"Hard it will make. Thirty-one years we stop here have. The old mister since."

Pierre nodded uneasily.

"I'm sorry," he said softly. But there was a new note of desperation in his words. "I just have to do it this way. I'm sorry I couldn't tell you sooner. But I didn't know."

In the ensuing silence, he heard Sara's movements in the room above.

"She's packing now," he lied. "She only decided to take the boat last night. It leaves tomorrow."

"Help she needs maybe?" Freda asked eagerly.

"She said she'd call if she wanted any. But I imagine you'll be pretty busy yourselves. I can loan you a couple of trunks and suitcases and you can take the light truck." He hurried on, "Let's see. It's fifty miles up there. Better get started by mid-afternoon. You can keep the truck as long as you need it. I'll have a shipper take the livestock up tomorrow."

He knew he was fumbling. He knew his reasons were shot with holes. He heard Heinrich's and Freda's unspoken questions:

But if staying here you are, who up the place keeps?

We make out it is better us to stay.

Alone in this house a man? Himmel. It makes bad.

"Fact is," Pierre said, as if answering his own conscience, "I'm thinking of selling Fountain Head." He added: "I was up there a few weeks ago. The last tenant left things in good shape. It's completely furnished.

There's plenty of fuel and you can take what food you'll need until tomorrow. Later—I'll give you the deed."

He said this with an air of finality and he arose. Freda heaved heavily to her feet. Heinrich stood up, fingering his cap. Pierre hoped the suddenness of his announcement would leave them too dazed to form suspicions until they had gone—and then he didn't give a damn.

Freda stood perplexed in the doorway. Finally, "Is sick the Fraulein?"

For the first time in the interview, Pierre told the truth.

"Yes."

Freda said, after another moment of concentration, "I hope well gets the Fraulein."

"The sea air will do wonders," Pierre assured her. He waited patiently for the Derhammers to leave, but still Freda stood uncertainly. At last she asked:

"But for supper tonight too yet?"

Pierre, realizing how much more complicated everything was than he had even dreamed, was brought up short. And when he hesitated, Freda said, wagging her head:

"Up the cold supper I fix before."

Pierre could have kissed her for that.

He sighed, but he breathed no easier when finally they left. He couldn't—he simply couldn't—stand their presence in this house another night.

* * *

Heinrich and Freda stood alone in the kitchen. Heinrich looked at the floor, diffidently, like a little boy who had been punished. Freda looked at him. Heinrich said finally:

"It makes queer, the mister."

He was thinking of the three milch cows, the two work horses, the riding horses, the chickens, the ducks, the pigs; not in his relationship as newly established owner, but of the more practical side. He was making out he would have to feed them hours early; that perhaps it would not be good in the morning to truck them without feeding first. He was thinking of Jason's milch cows at Buttercup.

"It makes queer," he repeated, without lifting his head.

Freda, in the rôle of good hausfrau suddenly discovering her kitchen world collapsing in disorder about her, shook her head slowly. Her eyes were moist.

"I feel it evil," she whispered. "Evil it goes near this creek by." Her voice shook with fear. "It makes good maybe we go." And, as Heinrich lifted his head, she made the fearsome sign of the horned finger.

For a long moment husband and wife looked into each other's eyes. Then, as if by mutual silent consent, each went about his tasks.

A WEEK passed, dismal and drear. The sky was overcast and light snow fell. insensibly, in the village and in the valley, tension relaxed. But Pierre would not know that. For not once had he left Fountain Head.

He was not a good housekeeper. He had never cooked. Once, in passing, he considered bringing out a cook from town. But the idea, he felt, was too dangerous.

So he kept house.

He muddled along, using twice as many pots and pans as were necessary for his cooking. Faithfully he prepared three meals a day. Religiously he appeared at Sara's door with a tray and left it there. She hardly touched a thing he served.

He stood that for the first three days. On the fourth he began to worry. The fifth day he spent an hour in her room. She sat in a chair by her window and stared out at the falling snow. She stared with a longing in her eyes.

The hollows of her eyes had deepened. The skin had tightened over the bones of her face. Pierre said:

"But, Sara, you *must* eat something."

Sara only shook her head.

On the sixth day, when Pierre visited her, she was noticeably weaker. She lay on her bed, eyes wide, face stony. On the night of the seventh day, Sunday, Dr. Hardt drove up.

Pierre's welcome was genuine. It was not that he was lonely, for each night Manning Trent—as much to get away from Julia and his own troubles as anything—had called. He would bring books: books on the occult, books on lycanthropy, books on magic, on witchcraft, on anthropology. He bought them in the city daily; he borrowed them from libraries. And each, Pierre and Trent—and, as it developed, Dr. Hardt—carried on his own research in what, lacking sound theological instruction, could be at best a blind and stumbling fashion.

Hardt himself brought the bulky Roman Ritual. Pierre thumbed the tenth section, devoted to mechanics of exorcism.

"What's frightening," he said, "is that we lose our technique from want of practice. The ancients made bronze we can't dream of duplicating. The Egyptians preserved bodies in a way to make us shake our heads. Now we've gotten away from Satan as well as away from God, and we know no more how to repel the former than to summon the Latter."

They sat around a log fire in the library. Gloomily, and with as gloomy an explanation, Trent passed the negative and positive of Red Crane's nocturnal work to the psychiatrist.

"You look at the negative first," he said.

Hardt studied them.

"What's this? What's this?" he demanded, with rising irritation. How do *I* know this print was taken from this wolf negative? Your man lied."

Trent shook his head slowly.

"He didn't lie. I made another print from it with my own hands. And if *you* want to try it. . ."

Hardt fingered the ribbon of his glasses and glared at Trent. All that he saw was complete sincerity. He clucked his tongue. He glanced back at negative and positive. He roared:

"Bah!"

But there was no assurance in his "bah." It was simply an automatic "bah" which permitted him time to digest the fact and save his face. Finally:

"Can't figure it, sir. Doesn't make sense." He tapped his fingers nervously on the arm of the chair. "Unless. . ."

He did not complete his thought. Pierre and Trent waited a moment. At length Pierre said:

"Doctor, I want you to look at Sara. She won't eat."

Hardt moved his large frame in a gesture of protest.

"You simply have to, Doctor," Pierre persisted. "I can't call in anyone else. You understand that. And I can't let her go on like this. She's simply fading away."

Hardt frowned. He lumbered to his feet.

"Where is she?" he snapped.

"In her room." Pierre nodded toward the ceiling.

"*Locked* in her room," amended Trent.

"Locked?" Dr. Hardt's black brows clouded stormily. "That's inhuman."

"You refused to commit her," Pierre reminded.

Hardt chewed perplexedly at his cigar.

"I'll see her," he said. Trent picked up a book, settled into his chair. Pierre led the psychiatrist into the hallway. They climbed the stairs in silence. A faint light burned in the upper passage. A brighter bar of light lay beneath the door to Sara's room. Pierre produced a key, inserted it in the lock, turned, and opened the door.

Sara was not in her room. She was not in her bathroom. She was not in her dressing room. Pierre stood in the center of the bedroom, stupefied.

Hardt stomped about the room, his annoyance rising.

"What's this?" he kept asking sharply. "What's this?"

Pierre said dully, "She isn't here."

Hardt asked, "She had a key of her own?"

"Do you think I'm an utter ass?"

"Well, where do these windows lead? Porch roof?"

"No. It's a straight drop to the flag walk."

Hardt strode to the windows. One, and only one, was open; and it was open but the breadth of his hand. He tugged at it.

"You can't open it farther," Pierre warned. "I installed stops."

Nevertheless, the doctor tried. When he gave up, he resumed stomping about the room.

"Nonsense," he muttered. "Nonsense, sir."

He poked into this closet and that; even looked under the bed. His eyes fell on Sara's dressing table. A crimson salve jar, half filled with a black unguent, caught his attention. He picked it up, sniffed at it.

"What's this?" he demanded.

Pierre shook his head wonderingly.

The doctor took a match from his pocket and daubed the stick with a minute quantity of the grease. Gingerly he touched it to his tongue.

"What the devil," he demanded, "is she doing with aconite?"

Dr. Hardt pretended, when they descended, that he didn't know what it was all about; he swore he wished he hadn't come out. It was still snowing. He washed his hands of the whole affair. He reiterated that he washed his hands.

But when Pierre told Trent, "Sara isn't there," Trent stared at him.

"Not there?"

"No."

Trent laid down his book. He repeated: "Sara isn't there?" He passed the back of his hand across his forehead. "Why. . ." Then, "My God!"

He reached for the telephone. Something in that movement recalled a similar occasion. How long ago? It seemed centuries. His hand shook. His voice trembled.

"You, Julia? Julia! Where's David?"

Julia's voice, brittle and distant, answered, "He went out a few minutes ago. I think he thought he heard something. He said he might go for a walk."

Three men, each with his own foreboding thoughts, sat down to wait.

It was, perhaps, his wider knowledge of such hellish matters that made Dr. Hardt, as he waited, even more restless than the others. Because of those earlier studies, he could

trace certain symptoms to their black origin. And he felt, though he felt it rebelliously because he could not rationalize it, that he knew what had happened to Sara.

She had, simply and logically, refused to starve to death.

Long since, he believed, she had moved beyond the desire for mortal food; she had reached that unholy ground where from others she must appropriate their life forces or die.

Now, to appease this fiendish appetite, she had called upon a loathesome force outside herself to free her from the bondage of her room.

A train of unhappy legends returned to Hardt:

The Herzegovinian *voukodlaks*, quaffing the hot blood of young girls.

The Wallachian *priccolitsch*, leeching nightly upon the bodies of domestic stock, appearing by day as a man in perpetual health and vigor.

The vampiric *vrykolaka*.

The dead *liougat* of the Albanians, striding abroad in his winding sheet to devour whatever fell in his path.

The psychiatrist arose from his chair, from which he had been moodily staring at the dancing flames in the fireplace, and moved tremendously about the room. Why, he wondered, could he not have staved away? It was no business of his. Ruinous as it might be to his professional standing, once it were known, it might prove more perilous still to his very existence. And yet, he knew that, man of strong will as he was, some triumphant compulsion had drawn him on this visit.

"Curiosity," he mumbled belligerently.

Pierre and Trent cast him sidelong looks.

A handsome clock stood on a far table, turning up the days as well as the hours and minutes. Hardt's glance at its face wheeled his thoughts into other channels. It was Sunday, December 18th. He said:

"Christmas is only a week away."

Pierre and Trent were silent. Hardt exploded.

"No, sir, it makes the least impression on you. But the Twelve Nights between Christmas and Epiphany. "

Again he broke a sentence in mid-voice.

Pierre knew what he meant. For as much as there are hallowed grounds in certain areas of earth, where spiritual peaks rise to touch planes of existence beyond most human comprehension, so are there periods of the year which stir to unnatural life.

"We *must* do something!" he exclaimed. "We *must!*"

The others sat silent.

He slumped even farther into the depths of his chair. He implored:

"We *can't* just sit. We *can't* simply talk. There must be *some* way out! Why, if there is a merciful God in heaven, can such things be?"

A long silence attended. Finally Hardt said in a voice that for him was restrained:

"Some things are permitted because of the sin of man."

Trent said:

"Difficult to believe. Difficult."

They were three rational men, of a rationalistic age; faith and belief were not strong in their hearts. They were aware of this, for they were also honest men. Dr. Hardt, still quietly, said:

"There is exorcism, sir—and there is nothing else."

The word held horror for Pierre; it was a word for a dark barbaric age.

Grasping at straws, he exclaimed, "We could get a priest. Somewhere we could get a priest!"

Hardt said, "Yes?"

The inflection rose sardonically. He continued:

"And he would take the matter to his bishop. The bishop would weigh the facts, and he might approve. And then he might not."

He paused again. Finally:

"Well, there's another point the ritual makes. You have to distinguish genuine possession from disease. So, besides priest and bishop, enter the physicians."

Pierre protested:

"But you, Doctor, would make the distinction."

"I?" Dr. Hardt looked aghast. "I would not, sir; I am a selfish man."

"But," faltered Pierre, "but you believe—in this?"

Dr. Hardt glared at Pierre. He would not answer.

And he did not answer. He said, instead:

"There are rules to be observed. The priest must be vested in surplice and violet stole. And the victim must pray, and fast, and confess." Hardt questioned, "I presume, Pierre, you could force Sara to pray and fast?"

Pierre said simply:

"No." He moved uneasily. "I can't see why I can't do the excorcism by myself."

"Without faith?" snapped Hardt.

"With love," Pierre replied. "With love for Sara. And perhaps faith that the ancient method will work."

Gloomily, they returned to the silence of their burning vigil.

MR. BOGARD, the sexton, who had a wooden leg, stumped about the First Methodist Church. He replaced the hymn books in their racks, a tiny enough task since the storm had kept many away from the Sunday-evening service.

He clomped down to the basement and shook the ashes in the big hard-coal furnace. He shoveled the ashes from the pit into a metal basket. He bedded the fire for the night.

"Got to be warm tomorrow," he thought. "Monday Circle meets."

He peered into the church kitchen in the other end of the basement. He clomped back upstairs, switching off lights as he progressed.

Mr. Bogard was an old man. His sparse hair was white and his face held many wrinkles. He worked slowly. He thought, "Got to sweep. I'll sweep tomorrow."

He switched out another light, and moved to a narrow, arched, stained-glass window. The window was slightly open and thin wisps of snow drifted in, melting on the sill.

The window swung on side hinges like a door. The sexton opened it wider a moment to look out. The cold air refreshed him. He was tired. Only that noon, just after the morning service, he had helped Slade dig the grave for the little Burke girl. And only an hour later old Mr. Pruett, the minister, had said the service over the grave.

Standing by the window, Mr. Bogard could see through the swirling snow toward that part of the graveyard. It was an old graveyard; older than the present stone church, which itself dated from the Revolution. Cement and stone slabs, weathered by the years, their epitaphs and dates and names blurred and obliterated, stood in drunken, crazy attitudes.

"Too bad about the little Burke girl," Mr. Bogard mumbled to himself. "Taken so quick like, and so young. Pneumonia, I guess it does that."

His old eyes squinted toward the graveyard. Something moving out there? Shadows, probably; the shadows of the trees.

Nothing worth noticing.

He closed the window and walked to the vestry door, tried it to see if old Mr. Pruett had locked it. Mr. Pruett was so absent-minded sometimes. He found it locked.

He walked to the rear pews, recovered his overcoat and single overshoe and pulled himself into them. Then he went into the vestibule, switched off the last light and went out through the great double door onto the porch. He locked the doors and, facing the slanting snow, turned up his coat collar.

The church stood at the east end of the village, the most easterly building. It faced north. On its west side was the sprawling parsonage. On its east, the graveyard which extended back to a row of old gnarled pines.

The sexton lived on Pinchsnuff Lane, back of the church by half a mile and not far—perhaps another half mile—below the confluence of the Neshaminy and the Bowling. That is, it was half a mile if he took the path through the graveyard, the pines, and across unfenced Leland's pasture. It was a good mile around by Wheeler Road.

Mr. Bogard, standing on the porch steps, considered. Maybe the snow hadn't drifted badly. He'd try it. Wheeler Road was a long way for a tired old man with only one good leg. He clomped down the stone steps.

"Have to get in early tomorrow," he mumbled. "Get these steps swept off for the ladies."

He limped and clomped along the path. The gravestones, modest and discreet, poked up at him. He peered ahead through the snow.

Again he thought he saw something move. Must be the shadows from that big maple. He could see the stark spreading limbs of the maple ahead. It had been a big tree even when he was a chit, sixty years ago. He rememberd that. He clomped along.

He approached the Burke plot, right beside the path. His good foot struck something hard in the path; something that was hard and yet gave. He balanced himself so as not to slip and fall. A man of seventy, with one leg, must not fall.

Wonderingly, he peered toward the grave. That mound of fresh earth should not be there. Hadn't he and Slade themselves filled in the grave over that tiny box? And the earth was fresh. It was barely sheathed with snow.

Later he was not certain which he had seen first. But when he stooped to examine the thing that his foot touched, and his hand felt it, he recoiled in cold horror.

* * *

It was Tom Summers' voice over the telephone that broke up the vigil of Pierre, Trent and Dr. Hardt. Trent's face was pale when he turned from the instrument.

Briefly he related the facts. Then he jammed on his coat and hat and announced:

"I'm going home. Dave," and his voice broke, "needs me."

Pierre moved toward Trent. He put out a detaining hand.

"He won't be home," Pierre said. "First he brings Sara home."

Manning Trent angrily brushed Pierre's hand away.

"Damn you!" he cried.

He slammed the door after him. And a dazed Pierre, standing half in the hallway and half in the library, stared at the door. When he returned to the room, his arms hung limply; Dr. Hardt detected moisture in his eyes.

Dr. Hardt said, after a moment, "He didn't mean, that, sir. He is simply upset."

Pierre said tonelessly, "I know. It's only—that everything comes at once."

He sat down, his short legs wide apart and his hands hanging lifelessly between them. He stared without seeing at the carpet. He said, at length, slowly, as if talking to himself:

"It's a time like this when you need—well, something to hold on to. Faith? I suppose that's it. What's a rational man to do?"

He said, wearily, "I'm going upstairs."

He ascended slowly, with heavy tread. He knew it was not necessary to knock. She would not be there. Yet—he tapped lightly on her door. He said:

"Sara?"

"Yes, Father."

The unexpected reply unnerved him. But he managed:

"May I come in, Sara?"

"Yes, Father."

He pushed open the door. Sara, a revolting picture of health, sat in a negligee at her dressing table, brushing her long black glistening hair.

* * *

The blind anger of the farmers and villagers, reaching new intensity with each outrage, assumed panic proportions when Sexton Bogard's story spread from cottage to house and from house to mansion.

"The valley," wrote Painter in the *Times*, "is in a state of mass catalepsy. It is obsessed with fear. It is a panic of the mind. These Pennsylvania Dutch farmers, ever suspicious of strangers, now eye them with open hostility."

Words half lost to the language from want of use returned. Where they had talked in and around forbidden matters, men now whispered of ghouls, of the hellborn, of the bewitched undead. Murder, the death and mutilation of living bodies, they understood. But the diabolical gluttony which impelled the desecration of the grave was a thing to harrow up the soul.

"The sun came out at noon," wrote Summers. "It lay cold on the fields of snow. You would have thought the valley was at peace. Yet every door and every window of every house was barred."

Even the most callous reporters were affected. Lynn wrote in the *News*:

"I saw the corpse of Gertrude Burke, a body rutted from its last resting place. It was an appalling thing. But more appalling was the lack of explanation."

And Doyle, returned to the scene by the *Mirror*, filed:

"Women were warned to walk abroad only in the company of men. And men were warned to carry arms. As for children, parents were asked to keep them at home. These are not hysterical rumors. They are the advice of the township's commissioners, and they carry the weight of the State Motor Police."

Colonel Winston Thorndike, commissioner of the State Police, arrived from his Olympian swivel chair in Harrisburg. He parried reporters with airy assurance:

"Haven't we solved every hex case that's ever come our way?"

But that night, after hearing the reports from his lieutenants, at the sub-barracks in Melton Crossing, his face grew set and grim.

Again—but only by daylight and only in greater numbers—posses scoured the woods. They beat up and down the watercourses. They stalked their unseen prey in silence.

BY NIGHT, the white patrol cars of the State Police prowled the back roads, the beams of their spotlights brushing each farmyard, wood and clearing. There was a concentration of these cars from many counties, each with its own cargo of smartly uniformed troopers in Sam Browne belts and an arsenal of machine guns and automatic pistols.

Men, bundled in overcoats and mackinaws, passed the cold nights standing guard over the graveyards. But at the Well, Klonsterman, narrowing his eyes and speaking from the side of his mouth, mumbled to Mandel:

"That is a fool thing. They only want the blood, not the 'balming stuff. The little Gertie wasn't 'balmed. They oughter watch jus' the graves of kids."

And, such was the hold of suspicion on the valley, Mandel wondered how Klonsterman knew.

Red Crane, after a week on other assignments, returned to the valley and joined Summers. Almost the first question Summers asked when they met at the Well was:

"What happened to that picture, Red?"

Crane lapped at his whiskey and soda. He said vaguely:

"It wasn't much good."

"Nuts!" snorted Summers. "You got a perfect shot."

Crane frowned. He shook his head.

"Underexposed. I was afraid the flash didn't have penetration for that distance."

Summers fell silent. He was not satisfied. Photographers of Crane's caliber seldom misjudged in a pinch.

* * *

Farson, the foreman at Trent Farms, said to Matlock, the stableman, as Matlock curried a horse:

"Can't figger young Mr. Trent out. Seems to of lost his holt on things."

Wallace, the butler, said to the maid, "The master seems in a perfect dither today."

And mentally and physically Manning Trent was. He spent Monday pottering about, traveling a hesitant circuit between his study, the library, the decanter on the dining-room sideboard and the broad windows of the library's southern exposure.

He was bewildered. He was afraid. Unlike Pierre, he possessed no reservoir of inner strength from which to draw. He blamed Pierre for his trouble; and in the same breath knew that he was wrong.

He realized the viciousness of his departure from Fountain Head the previous night; but he hadn't the slightest idea of offering an apology. The more he considered, the more he was convinced that his son was an unwilling tool—for David, unlike Pierre's description of Sara, still made some pretense of enjoying his meals.

Yet the very realization that David was held in the closing coils of something quite beyond himself made it that much more difficult for Trent to discuss the problem with him. Had it been otherwise, had David been a volunteer to these abominations, there might have been room for open argument.

Trent got up. He walked from his study into the library, through the drawing room and through the music room into the dining room. As he stood at the sideboard, he saw in the wide strip of mirror that girdled the walls the pantry doors open and Julia appear. He saw her stop and glance toward his back.

"I do wish," she said primly, "that you wouldn't be so nervous, Manning."

And she disappeared through the other doorway.

Manning, with a deep breath that might have been a formless curse, poured himself a stiff drink of whiskey, gulped it; poured another, mixed it, carried it back to the library. He placed the drink on the smoking stand beside his chair and sat down. But he was too nervous to remain seated long.

He got up and moved to one of the wide high windows. Across the wide terraces of the lawn, now blanketed with snow, he could see the state highway. As he watched, a white patrol car rolled slowly past. Its glass heliographed dumb messages.

He watched it grow smaller and finally disappear over the crest of the hill. Then, along the brick walk that led from the peach orchard, he saw David, shod in galoshes, slosh toward the house.

David walked slowly. His broad shoulders sagged. Trent recalled how tired he had appeared when he had seen him the preceding night. The sight of him now, the renewed and hammering realization of that terrifying lack drove Trent from the window. But there was no stemming the sense of urgency to do something, anything, that pressed upon him.

He drank. He thought: Go to the police? Explain everything?

Ye-ss? He could hear their coarse jeers.

His fingers closed as he considered.

If it could be bruited about that Sara, far from being on an ocean voyage, actually was hiding in her home.

If it could be rumored among these superstitious farmers and villagers that she might bear a close inspection.

If it could be somehow suggested—suggested with the greatest subtlety—that there were age-old ways of dealing with instruments of evil, then:

Might there not be some release for David?

"Good God!" he exclaimed aloud. "What devil has gotten into me?"

PIERRE missed the visits of Manning Trent. In a roundabout way, through the grocer's garrulous boy, he learned that Trent had been seen drunk in the village.

Once he walked to the Trent house; thought, as he approached the door, he saw Manning within. But the maid told him that both Manning and Julia were out. Nor did he see David about.

Nights, in his study, he considered many things. He considered a journey to a distant priest he had met many years before. Yet—how leave Sara?

He remembered old Hans Ehlers, whom the Derhammers had visited on occasion. Yet he felt, without quite knowing why, that old Hans was an impostor.

He read deeply, and in the accounts of old French and English trials he learned of horrendous yet logical matters:

Of the common lust among warlocks for human flesh and blood.

Of their passions for the lower animals. . . .

Of how, since they were the bond slaves of Satan, they were permitted to use his hell-

ish craft to transform themselves into beasts, the better to satisfy their craven hungers.

Always, Pierre learned, these beasts retained their human eyes, for the eyes were the windows of the soul, and the soul—the forfeit to Satan—could not change.

Was that the reason, Pierre wondered, that young Mrs. Heath at Melton Crossing saw not a wolf's eyes but eyes that were human in their agony? Was it the bartered soul writhing in anguish at the judgment that lay upon it?

And so Pierre read, seeking the spring that, once pressed, would release all in life that he held dear.

He learned the many methods which, the folklore claimed, were used in dispossessions: of the necessity of wounding a werebeast while still in its state of metamorphosis—difficult, since few saw it and fewer recognized it. But hadn't Heinrich Derhammer seen and fired? And what had happened? Nothing. But that, Pierre learned, was because Heinrich's bullet was neither blessed nor silver.

Hmm. If he could obtain a blessing for a bullet.

But always, when he approached this question, Pierre found himself faced with the same dilemma: the necessity of submitting the problem to the clergy, of answering their incisive questions. And he kept saying. "But there *must* be some other way. Surely God could not have given the only key to a privileged few."

He studied Saint Ambrose, Bodin, Sprenger, Vincent of Beauvais. He studied the sacramentals: learned of their curious power to fend off evil; found that the chalice and the font were blessed .

With slow labor he wove his threads of knowledge together until they made a fabric.

Wednesday. And Wednesday night.

Thursday. And Thursday night.

Pierre himself was not conscious of the evolution of his thought; of the slow and certain march of mood and understanding carrying him to decisions he would not have considered a fortnight earlier.

In the vacuum created by the desertion of Trent, Pierre found himself saying and repeating:

"A man has to fight his own battles."

At first the thought was born in bitterness. But as the days passed, his natural sense of justice told him that a man, too, might choose his own weapons; and, that being so, no blame could be attached to Manning for his withdrawal. And yet .

Had he known the weapon with which Trent toyed, could he have surmised the monstrous intent which the half-crazed Manning entertained upon his drunken visit to the village, doubtless the charity in Pierre's nature would have withered.

Pierre asked, Was not the conclusion just that, since the powers of Satan existed only through the acquiescence of God for God's own purposes, any contract with Satan could be dispelled by God's interference?

* * *

Friday. And Friday afternoon.

There were occasions when Pierre wondered if his sanity would hold. There were other occasions when he was racked with fear at the mere thought of human interference in matters of such black moment.

Yes, despite such mental by-passes, the signal objective remained with him: he must save Sara. Nor, until today, did he consider any salvation but to make her whole, to remove the disease, to return her to her former self.

So it was that he carried this thought this afternoon when, with the early sun lowering beyond the western woods, he ascended to her room with a tray of hot tea.

He had seen the many changes that came with the weeks: he had seen her body alter; he had seen her skin dry up and her cheeks grow thin with apparent hunger; and again, he had seen her vitality restored by those nocturnal excursions.

But always, no matter what her condition, Pierre saw Sara as blood of his blood. There was that remaining in her movement, in her eyes, that revealed and proved the validity of herself. But today.

As he walked into the room and set the tray upon a bedside stand, Pierre found—outstretched on the bed—only a caricature of the original. The white cheeks were tinted with sulphurous yellow; the body movements were more gross, more animal than human; and when she raised her head to see him, she had a cunning look—out of eyes no longer her own and in which the lights of perdition burned.

Pierre did not lock her door when he left. When he descended the stairs, it was with the final knowledge that he was alone.

Chapter Seven

CHRISTMAS EVE fell like a cloud upon the valley. In the churches the parties for the children were held by day instead of by evening. And they were grim events. The children were whisked from their homes by armed men, and they were guarded in the churches and they were whisked back to their homes.

At Trent Farms Manning drank the afternoon away; an afternoon which found Julia absent on one of her numberless "charities" and David keeping restlessly to his rooms.

Manning finally went for a walk.

He walked stiffly, trying to hold himself together until he reached the screen of the peach orchard. He relaxed then, and his progress was more slow and more unsteady.

The cold air refreshed him, but it did not sober him. Still, in the open, a thought retained greater cohesion. What was the thought? Pierre? But if he had the germ of an idea of visiting Pierre, it was lost when he reached the other side of the orchard. There, he could look down the slope toward a small wooded vale; and above the vale he could see the bare slope of Mt. Neshaminy, and to the left he could see a figure—Pierre, firing a rifle at a target.

When he returned home, Julia had already arrived. He knew that any effort to take hold of himself had failed, when she confronted him.

"I don't know why, Manning," she said crisply, "you think you always have to get drunk for a holiday."

* * *

There were four churches in the village: the First Methodist, the Episcopalian, the little Roman Catholic Chapel of St. Hubert, and the Friends Meeting House.

No one quite remembered how the Catholic Chapel came to be dedicated to Hubert, the patron of the huntsman. It must have been a long while back, for the small ivy-covered stone edifice was very old.

And no one was more disturbed by the events of recent weeks than Father O'Burgh, the kindly, complacent, ineffectual shepherd of the parish.

A thin and ancient little man, his was a depth of devotion supported by small inclination to action. He felt that, above any priest in the diocese, it was his special province—since the Lord (to say nothing of his bishop) had assigned him to the Chapel of St. Hubert—to protect those who sought to track down the marauding beasts.

Yet, what could a poor man do? He prayed—and he fended his ears from the irrational tales which came to him from the more superstitious of his flock. No one, not even a priest, expected the Devil to make a personal appearance in enlightened Pennsylvania in this twentieth century of Our Lord.

No, he was more concerned with form. And he was, therefore, no little disturbed when, preparing on Christmas Eve for the midnight mass, he entered the sacristy through the door which led from the altar—to discover the sacrificial chalice missing.

There was no doubt of theft. The other door, which opened into the night, stood ajar, Through it blew the cold wind. And by the light that spilled out of the church, Father O'Burgh saw on the snow a line of footprints leading to the church and another leading away.

"God ha' mercy," he breathed, and he would have been the most surprised person in the world had he had any idea at all that those three brief words would be answered. Trite as they were, they yet mysteriously compelled (or, at least, so one might read into the consequences) a restraint upon that automatic loss of consecration of the sacred vessel which, the legislators of Church solemnly averred, would occur if it fell into profane hands.

The priest telephoned to the sub-barracks at Melton Crossing.

"About five inches high, I should say," he said. "Oh, yes; silver. Gilded within by gold. . . ."

The lieutenant in charge was polite. He said he would "see what can be done, Father." Yes, polite was the word. But he was not, Father O'Burgh considered afterwards, sufficiently impressed.

Father O'Burgh could not know that the chief concern at that moment at the sub-barracks was the failure, after two hours, of the white patrol car carrying Corporal Moberly and Private Aalborg to respond to radioed instructions.

FOR twenty-three years Private Aalborg's hair had been auburn. It was white when, at two o'clock Christmas morning, searchers found him stumbling out of Lacey's Lane into Fishing Mill Road near the Galehouse Caldwell place.

His uniform was tattered, blood-soaked; his face was bruised and cut; his sleeveless right arm was grooved with long parallel clawlike tears, and his twisted left arm hung disjointed from its shoulder socket. He stared with the vacancy of the idiotic; and he gabbled incoherencies.

They found the car in a clearing off Lacey's Lane, not far from the mill where Nellie Sage had first seen the "white thing." Along a snow-covered path a little way down Bowling Creek, they found the body of Corporal Moberly—his uniform shredded to threads and great ugly rips in his frozen thighs.

The searchers, lamps in hand, stood in shocked silence.

The snow was pocked with bootprints. There were deep animal tracks.

"Must've seen something," Private Black said moodily.

"Must've," said Private Reid. He flicked his flashlight over the terrain.

"Saw something?" asked another.

"Maybe. Or maybe they parked to wait."

"And saw it and got out to shoot," suggested Black. And Reid said:

"Here's where they got out. Both on the right side. And walked up that way—ahead of the car."

"Easy, there! Don't blur those tracks."

"Look! Looks like just one set of tracks It was there, in front of the car, and they were walking toward it. But. "

The men were puzzled. It made no sense. Two men and one beast. Why couldn't they kill it? Two men with guns.

Quickly enough they learned the truth. For behind and to the left of the car they found an impression in the snow where a second larger animal had crouched; crouched, and leaped upon the unsuspecting troopers as they advanced to attack the first.

Slowly they digested the significance of this awful cunning. And Klonsterman, stopping some hours later at Mandel's house, said darkly:

"If'n the police can't protect us—"

In the parish house Father O'Burgh wonderingly unwrapped the brown paper from a weighty package. The paper was stamped, "Special Delivery." Within the wrapping was a cardboard box.

Within the box was cotton packing. And when Father O'Burgh removed the packing, he stared, mouth open, at a golden chalice. There was no explanation; only the firm name of Bond & Starr, Jewels, Chestnut Street east of Broad Street, Philadelphia.

* * *

At Trent Farms, Manning Trent began to tremble when David entered the library. He trembled so violently that the whiskey and soda spilled from the glass he held.

Julia appeared. Her eyes were cold and her lips compressed when she glanced at Manning and saw the glass. And then, turning to her son, Julia said:

"Why, David. You aren't looking very well for Christmas."

Manning got up and left the room. Thought was blurred. But there lay, within the blur, a focused space that made him wonder at the miracle of Julia's blindness.

Stay out of Julia's way, he warned himself. He finished his drink. He poured and drank another in the dining room. He rang for Wallace, who helped him into his overcoat and overshoes. He put on his hat and left the house.

It was late. It was on toward dusk. Down on the highway a car passed, two spotlights arcing from the road. At least. . . . At least. . . . They'd gotten men last night, not children. . . What was that about the priest? Father O'Burgh? Did they do that, too?

He walked away from the house. He walked aimlessly. It was dusk, and he made no effort to control himself when his legs faltered.

The valley was of ghastly beauty in the dusk. The snow took on a faint blueness. The black trees stood sharply against the lowering gray of the sky. Lights flickered from the houses in the valley. And in some of the far-off windows the faint red and green lights of the yuletide shone timidly.

HE FOLLOWED his own winding drive through the trees to the State Highway. At his gates he stood uncertainly.

Why not? he asked. If he could save David. She was damned, any way you looked at it. He, publisher of a lurid newspaper, well knew the insidious quality of innuendo.

He leaned against the tall gatepost. Well—but there were two beasts. If they dragged Sara from her home and found the lack, wouldn't their observations quicken? Wouldn't they seek the same lack in another? In those close to Sara? In Pierre? And then—in David?

And so he did not turn toward the village. He walked, instead, south along the highway, not quite knowing what impelled him in that direction. The darkness gathered about him. And the stars appeared.

Here it is, the junction with the Old Post Road, leading to Fountain Head. Of course. Stop and call on Pierre. Christmas night. See old friends. He turned into the road. And he walked under the oaks.

Fountain Head, on the old Post Road, appeared suddenly beyond a wooden bend. Its suddenness dismayed Trent.

But he approached the house, and glanced through a library window. There was a blaze in the fireplace, but he did not see Pierre.

He hesitated again at the porch. Fondness for Pierre and bitterness renewed their battle. And bitterness won. He kept on, hugging the south wall of the house, until he reached the first of the study windows.

He thought, in a moment of sanity. Good God! This is a crazy thing.

Then, cautiously, he peered through the window.

Pierre was seated at a table. On the table was spread a newspaper. On the newspaper were the parts of a rifle—the 30.30, Trent thought. Pierre was cleaning the parts.

With difficulty Trent tried to remember something—about that gun—about Pierre. Yes, that was it—target practice yesterday. The pores of Trent's forehead released sweat. Good God! Did Pierre think *himself* in danger?

Pierre got up, half turning toward the window. Trent ducked. When, in a moment, he again looked into the room, Pierre had replaced the parts of the rifle, and was standing in a corner at a cabinet on which rested an object of fascinating silvery brilliance. The object was across the room and Trent's vision was blurred. He could not identify the object.

But now he saw something else—bullets on the table; a Bunsen burner, and on a stand above the burner a small iron cup. Solidified drippings of bright white metal hung from the lip of the cup.

Trent's puzzled eyes narrowed—and he must have made some sound. For Pierre turned suddenly toward the window.

When Pierre appeared, flashlight in hand, he found only tracks leading from and returning to the Old Post Road. When he went back into the house, he thought about those tracks for a long time. But he was not afraid.

* * *

The stars that came out on Christmas night at dusk were brushed away by clouds. The air grew still. And snow fell.

The snow fell almost without a sound. And then a breeze was born in the northeast. And the snow that had fallen quietly now fell in dancing whorls.

The breeze became a wind. It blew in cold, sharp gasps, and the snow began to beat slantwise against the earth.

The wind became a gale. The snow drummed the earth. Yet Pierre, shod in the same old leather boots that had carried him after caribou in the Northern Woods, still tramped up and down the Neshaminy. The snow stung his cheeks.

For four hours Pierre marched, gun slung under his right arm. At midnight, he returned to Fountain Head. Sara was in her room. Immediately, Pierre went outdoors. He circled the house. But such was the drifting of the snow that he could not tell from which direction she had approached.

He re-entered the house. On his way to his room he paused at her door. He opened it, and looked in. She sat at the long mirror of her dressing table. In the mirror he saw her face. And she saw his.

"Don't look at me like that!" she cried.

He went to his room.

It was noon when Pierre awoke. His mind was still of one determined piece But there came to his thought a sense of new urgency. For this was the first of the Twelve Nights. And he must hurry, hurry.

He ate sparingly in the kitchen. He did not trouble to prepare a tray for Sara. Not since that night when his own eyes told him that he had lost her had he troubled. He returned to the library, switched on the radio. He heard the news announcer's voice tell of a happening more awful in its suggestiveness than some of the actual crimes: of how Wendell Mawson, mortician at Melton Crossing, heard the night before the hard breathing of beasts sniffing about the rear door of his mortuary.

Pierre switched off the radio.

The day dragged. Once, peering out the window, Pierre saw the snow-veiled figures of a group of hunters in a far field. They walked slowly and they kept close together, their guns slung under their arms. Pierre thought: If they could only know their hunting was in waste.

BY EVENING the snow had stopped falling. But the sky was still coated with heavy clouds and when Pierre went out, he found the woods—despite the dull reflection from the snow—dark and difficult of passage.

Again, for four hours, he tramped the course of the Neshaminy. And again he returned. And now a sense of panic gripped him. He slept fitfully. He dreamt dreams of paralytic helplessness. And in the morning he was not rested. It was Tuesday. But it was more than Tuesday. It was the second of the Twelve Nights, and God in His Heaven alone knew the power for evil that burned in these passing hours.

When Pierre saw Sara, he saw the hungry look. And he did not know whether to be glad that she, too, had failed in her mission or to fear that her hunger forecast a desperation.

Horror to come.

Again, that day, the hunt continued in the countryside. But at dusk the hunters trooped wearily to their homes. And only the State Police were left to carry on. And even they patrolled only the lanes and roads.

The waiting pressed on Pierre. It was more with nervousness than chill that he trembled when he left the house. If he failed.

The second of the Twelve Nights was clear and sharp and cold. It was a night of crystal. The stark trees were etched against the glittering snow by the light of the stars. In the north smouldered the aurora borealis.

He walked farther than on the previous nights. He followed the path northward and westward along the Neshaminy. A lacelike fringe of ice clung to the sides of the banks. He found tracks, animal tracks. But whether they had been laid there only hours ago or whether on the preceding night, he could not tell.

Grimly he went on.

He reached the canyon on Trent's land; the narow canyon where Crane and Summers had lain in wait; where, a little beyond, Heinrich had raised his gun and fired. And he passed through the canyon and came to the clearing. And he came out so suddenly that at first he could not believe his eyes. For, from the other side, their huge paws crunching the snow, emerged the forms of two shadowy animals.

A merciful memory fled that moment. In the after time Pierre seemed to recall that from some far distance two reports sounded in quick succession. But when again memory served, he was bending over Sara, holding her head in his arms, holding her close—watching by the light of the stars a miraculous transfiguration return to him his daughter. His daughter—his child—her long black hair warm against his hands, her eyes shining and wet with tears of gratitude.

He felt her body tremble only once. It was a little wave, rippling down from her head, coursing along the muscles to her legs. The light went out of her eyes. Pierre laid her head upon the ground.

Still crouching beside her, he glanced up—and saw David towering over him; David, his eyes on Sara but his right arm clutching his wounded left and his face contorted with pain.

Yet there was amazement in the look of pain. He glanced, bewildered, about him: at the rifle in the snow, at Pierre, and again at Sara.

"You . Did you

Pierre straightened, and stood up.

"I did it," he said simply.

David's voice was a whisper.

"She's Is she dead?"

"Yes. She's dead."

"B-but—" David's bewilderment grew. The impediment of his speech returned. "B-but why? Why did you?" His voice rose. "Why?"

Pierre was never more composed.

"To save her," he said. "To save her soul. To save you."

The pain in David's arm sharpened. But wonder still covered the pain.

"S-save?" He turned the word over. "Kill—to save? D-don't talk nonsense!"

"It's not nonsense," Pierre said evenly. "To save you from the form—the wolf's form; from the very devil himself, David."

Suddenly horrified, Piere stepped forward. He touched David.

"David! Don't you remember, David?" The frantic quality of his voice increased. "Don't you remember?"

Angrily, suspiciously, David shook him off, his voice rasping.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Are you mad?"

Still clutching his arm, David bent over Sara. "Darling, darling. You can't die! Speak to me, darling." His tormented words faded. "But darling," he sobbed, "you can't leave me!"

Pierre turned away. He walked toward the canyon. He walked blindly. David stood up, watching Pierre's stumbling retreat. And in that moment he understood. He turned, looked down again at the still form.

"He had to do it, Sara. He had to do it."

Pierre kept on walking, stumbling through the snow. And about him the curtain of the irrationality of the past weeks fell away and he saw the vista of the future revealed for what it was. With each step that he placed upon the snow he knew that the footprint would be followed and would support whatever story David chose. But had he not already known that in his heart?

He emerged from the southern mouth of the canyon. There was still Manning, he thought. There was still Dr. Hardt. And then he knew there weren't. The lamp of cold reason was lighted, and he knew of no human bond that could stand the test he might apply.

David's words echoed and re-echoed. They became a damning refrain:

"We were just out walking—walking along the path."

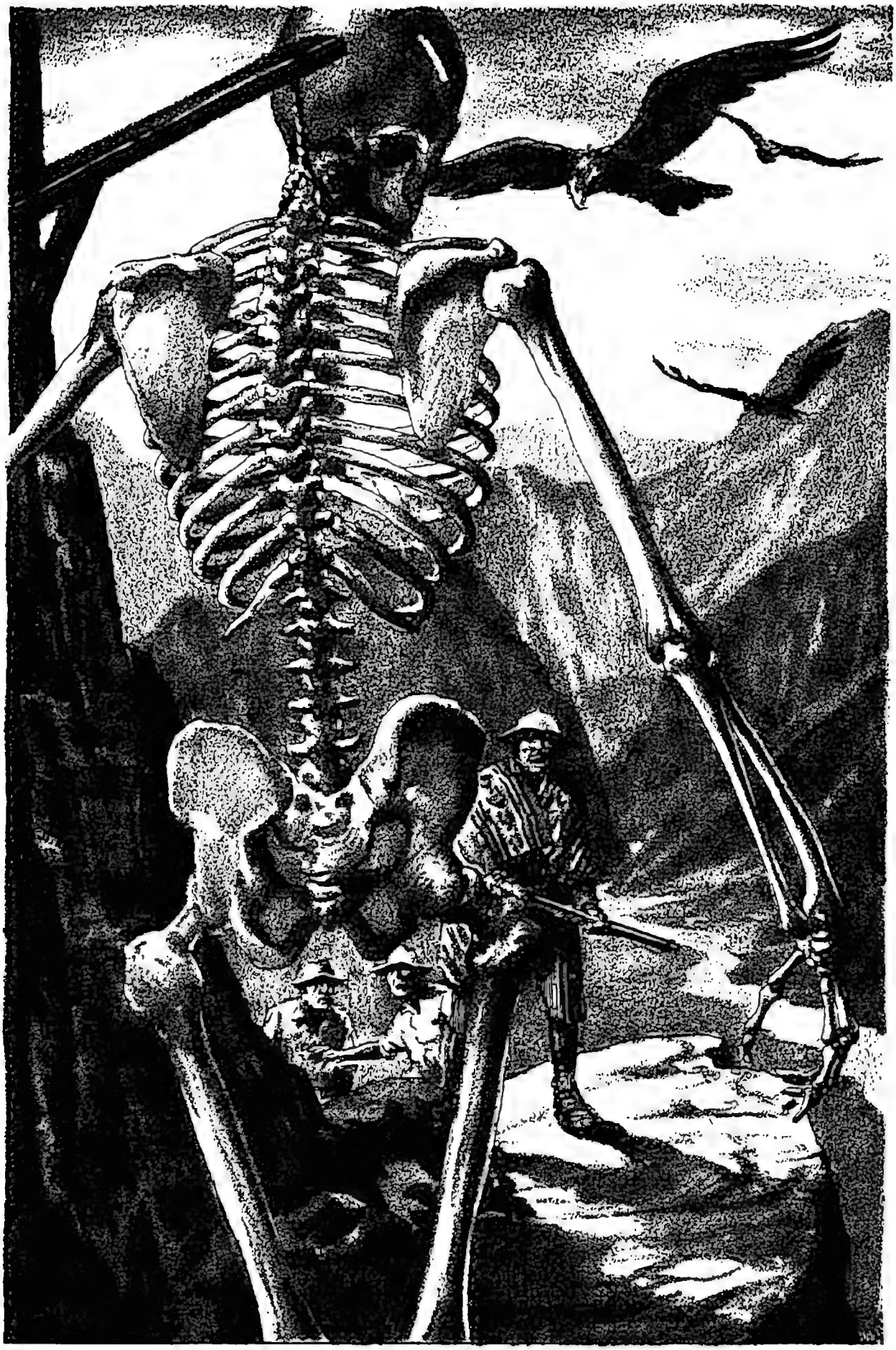
One foot, then the other; one bootprint, then another. They'd have ballistics experts. They'd match the bullets with the gun. They'd find his fingerprints on the trigger. They would make casts of the bootprints. They would match them with his boots.

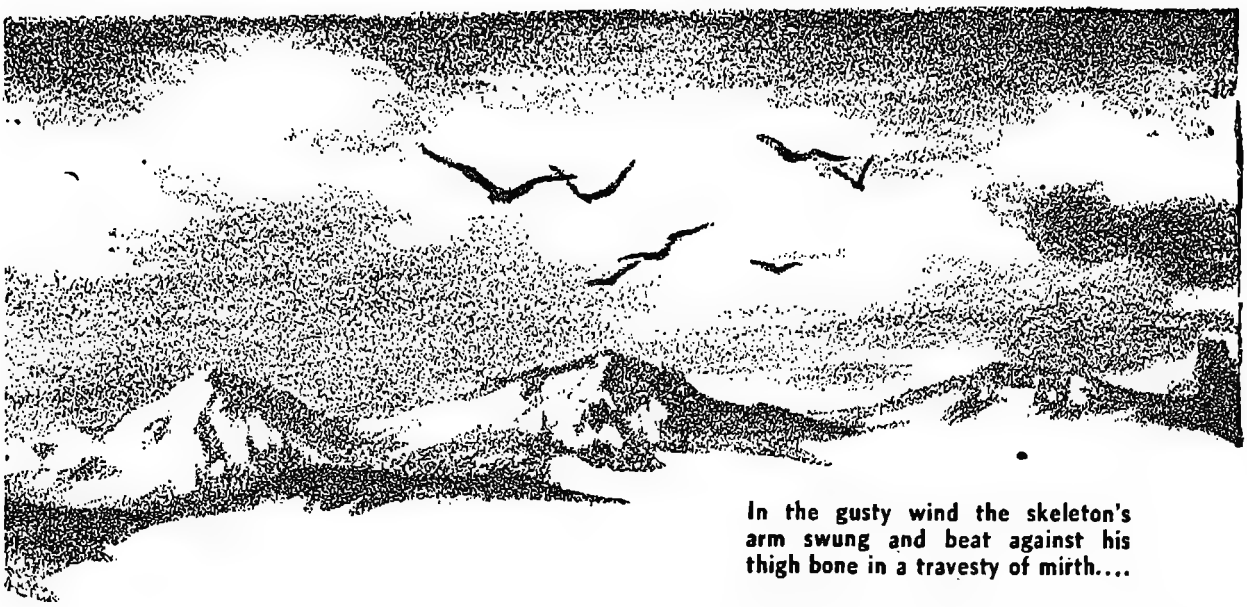
And there would be the chalice, with part of its lip missing—the part he had melted down for bullets.

But the attacks would cease! Yes, yes. The attacks would cease. Pierre thought of that excitedly. Still—a clever district attorney could show there were never any beasts at all. The beasts were Pierre, roaming the country at night. And there would be David:

"We were just out walking. . "

Pierre's body sagged. He walked more slowly. And then, again, he saw the gratitude in Sara's eyes. ■ ■ ■





In the gusty wind the skeleton's arm swung and beat against his thigh bone in a travesty of mirth....

Helplessly, prisoners of their own terror, they waited for whatever unearthly doom would descend upon them. . . . For scientists and savages alike sensed the strange menace utterly new to mankind, forecast in the frightful manifestation of

The Green Splotches

By T. S. Stribling

TRANSCRIBED FROM THE FIELD NOTES OF JAMES B. STANDIFER, SECRETARY DeLONG GEOGRAPHICAL EXPEDITION TO THE RIO INFIERNILLO, PERU, WITH INTRODUCTORY NOTE BY J. B. S.

SECRETARY'S NOTE

THE strange not to say sinister record of the De Long Geographical Expedition to the department of Ayacucho, Peru, is here given to the public in order that a wider discussion of the facts herein set forth may lead to some solution of the enigmas with which this narrative is laden.

These field notes have been privately circulated among the members of the DeLong Geographical Society, and the addenda to this account written by our president, Gilbert H. DeLong, have proved highly gratifying to the writer. No doubt this effort at publicity will bring forward other and equally interesting hypotheses.

It is hardly necessary to warn readers who devote themselves exclusively to fiction that this record is not for them.

Fiction deals in probabilities; geographical societies, unfortunately, are confined to facts. Fiction is a record of imaginary events, which, nevertheless, adheres to and explains human experience. Facts continually step outside of experience and offer riddles and monstrosities.

Thus, in a way, fiction is much truer than fact. Fiction is generalized truth; it is an international legal tender accredited everywhere; fact is a very special truth, which passes current only with the most discerning—or with none.

Therefore the writer wishes heartily to commend the great American scramble after fiction. It shows our enlightened public wishes

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to get at the real universal truths of L. without wasting precious moments on all such improbabilities as science, history, archeology, biography, invention and exploration.

To the last of this censored list these field notes unfortunately belong.

In conclusion the writer wishes to admit that he favors the Incan theory in explaining this narrative, and the reader is warned that this prejudice may color these notes. However, it has not been the writer's intention to do violence, through any twisting of fact, to the Bolshevik theory of Prof. Demetrios Z. Demetriovich, the Rumanian *attaché* to the expedition, or to the Jovian hypothesis of our esteemed president, the Hon. Gilbert H. DeLong, than whom, be it said, no man is more tolerant of the views of others.—JAMES B. STANDIFER, Sec. DeL. Geo. Exp., Sept. 17, 1919.

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

The writer met the DeLong Geographical Expedition at Colon in June, 1919, on their way to New York. His curiosity was strongly aroused by the fact that every member of the party, even to the twenty-four-year-old secretary of the expedition, Mr. James B. Standifer, was completely white-headed and seemed to be suffering from some nervous complaint in the nature of a shell shock.

At that time the writer was correspondent for the Associated Press and he naturally saw a "story" in the returning scientists. After some effort and persuasion, he obtained Mr. Standifer's field notes and photographs. The photographs were practically worthless on account of the deterioration of the films. And a single glance through the notes showed him that they were not practicable "A.P." material. After much consideration and many discussions with Mr. Standifer, the writer decided that the only possible form in which this strange memoranda could be placed before the public was in the guise of fiction.

Unfortunately this disguise is neither deep nor cleverly done. The crude outline of the actual occurrences destroys all approach to plot. Many of the incidents are irrelevant, but the only condition upon which Mr. Standifer would agree to this publication at all was that his record be given *in extenso*, "for the benefit," he stated, "of future and more studious generations."

In fact, throughout the writer's association with him, Mr. Standifer seemed of a sour, not to say misanthropic, disposition. His sarcasm, which he hurls at the American fiction-reading public in his prefatory note, is based entirely, the writer believes, on the fact that Standifer wrote a book of travel called "Reindeer in Iceland," which he published at his own expense and which entirely failed to sell. That, no doubt, is enough to acidulate the sweetest disposition, but in a way it goes to prove that Mr. Standifer's notes on the Peruvian expedition are a painstaking and literal setting forth of genuine experiences, for a perusal of "Reindeer in Iceland," which the writer purchased from Mr. Standifer for fifty-three cents, shows its author has absolutely no imagination whatever.

It is hardly worth while to add that the explanatory note appended to this narrative by that distinguished scholar and author, the Right Honorable Gilbert H. DeLong, has not been touched by this pen.—T.S., Sept. 27, 1919.

Chapter One

SEÑOR IGNACIO RAMADA, prefect of the department of Ayacucho, tapped his red lips under his mustache to discourage an overpowering yawn. It was mid *siesta*, high noon. He had been routed out of profound slumber by his *cholo*—boy—and presented with a long impressive document with a red seal. Now he stood in the Salle des Armes of the governor's mansion, holding in his hand the letter of introduction from the *presidente* of the Lima Sociedad de Geografico, very much impressed even amid his sleepiness by the red seal of the *sociedad* and by the creaking new equipment of his callers.

"How, *señores*, can I assist in such a glorious undertaking?" he inquired in Spanish.

"We need guides," explained Prof. Demetriovich, who was the linguist of the party.

"Where does your journey carry you, *caballeros?*" inquired the official, cracking the parchment in his hand.

"To the region beyond the Mantaro, called the Valley of the Rio Infiernillo."

Señor Ramada came out of his sleepiness with a sort of start.

"No!"

"Yes."

The prefect looked at his guests.

"*Señores*, no one goes there."

Pethwick, the engineer, smiled.

"If the region were quite well known, Señor Ramada, it would hold little attraction for a geographical exploration party."

"Well—that's true," agreed the prefect after a moment's thought, "but it will be quite difficult to get a guide for that place; in fact—" here he swept his visitors with a charming smile—"the better a man knows that region, the farther he keeps away from it. Seriously, gentlemen, why not explore some more hospitable locality, where one can find a comfortable inn at night and procure relays of llamas when necessary for your baggage?"

Pethwick smiled friendlily.

"We did think of exploring the suburbs of Lima, but the street service was so bad—"

"Do you read novels?" inquired Standifer, the young secretary of the expedition.

"Why—yes," admitted the prefect, taken aback; "I am fond of Cisneros, Lavelle, Arestegui—"

The secretary pressed his lips together, nodded disdainfully and without further remark looked away through the entrance into the diamond-like brilliance of tropical sunshine in mountainous regions.

The prefect stared. "*Señor,*" he said rather sharply, "if you do not approve my literary taste—"

Pethwick stepped to the little Spaniard's side and whispered quickly:

"Overlook it, *señor,* overlook it. Literature is a tender point with him. He has lost one hundred and fifty-four dollars and forty-seven cents on an unprofitable literary venture. In fact, he is a young author."

He nodded confidentially at the prefect.

The official, with Latin delicacy, nodded back and patted Pethwick's arm to show that all was again well. Pethwick then said aloud—

"So we shall have to try to find our own way into the Valle de Rio Infiernillo?"

Ramada looked worried. Presently he slapped his hand on a mahogany sword cabinet that glowed warmly in the subdued light of the *salle.*

"*Señores!*" he cried, rattling the letter of introduction with his left hand. "It shall never be said that the prefect of the department of Ayacucho did not exert plenary powers to aid in disclosing to the world the enormous riches of his province and his native land!"

"So we may expect something?" inquired M. Demetrivich.

"I have the power to force some one to go with you," announced Ramada dramatically.

"Who?" asked Standifer, looking around.

"Naturally my authority does not extend over freemen," conditioned the prefect.

"Your slaves?" inquired the secretary.

"Sir," announced the prefect, "wherever the Peruvian banner waves, Freedom smiles!"

"What at?" inquired the literal secretary

As the governor was about to take new offense the old Rumanian hastily inquired—

"Who do we get, Señor Ramada?"

"*Señores,* a garroting has been widely and I believe successfully advertised to take place on the fifth of August. If I may say it, *caballeros,* my political career depends in great measure on meeting fully and completely the thrills offered by my prospectuses. The executions will be followed by a bullfight. It was, gentlemen, if I may say it, it was to be the turning-point of my political career, upon the prestige of which I meant to make my race for the presidency of our republic.

"Gentlemen, a time comes in the life of every statesman when he can sacrifice his country to his personal ambition, or his personal ambition to his country. That moment has now come in the life of Gonzales Pizarro Ramada. Gentlemen, I make it. Gentlemen, I am going to remit the extreme penalty placed by the *cortes* upon a murderer and a highwayman and permit them to go with you, gentlemen, as guides into the Valle de Rio Infiernillo."

Pethwick, who had been smiling with immense enjoyment at this rodomontade straightened his face.

"A murderer and a highwayman!"

"Charming fellows," assured the prefect. "I often walk down to the *carcel* and converse with them, I and the padre. Such *chic!* Such original ideas on the confiscation of money—really very entertaining!"

The expedition looked at the eulogist a moment.

"Give us a minute to talk this over, Señor Ramada?" requested M. Demetriovich.

The prefect made the accentuated bow of a politician, adding that the republic would be proud to furnish chains and handcuffs to guarantee that her sons did their duty in the discharge of a patriotic function.

The three gentlemen of the DeLong Geographical Expedition spent an anxious five minutes in debate.

Presently Pethwick called—

"Señor Ramada, are you absolutely sure that we can not procure guides who are less-questionable for this journey?"

"Gentlemen, to be frank," said the prefect, who had also been studying over the matter, "I doubt very much whether either Cesare Ruano or Pablo Pasca would be willing to accompany you under those terms. I can not force them. The law prohibits any unusual or cruel infliction of the death penalty and to send them to the valley of the Rio Infiernillo would fall under that prohibition."

The four men stood meditating in the Salle des Armes. Professor Demetriovich stirred.

"Let's go have a talk with them," he suggested.

CONTRARY to Ramada's fears, Cesare Ruano, the man-killer, and Pablo Pasco, the road-agent, proved willing to escort the party to the Rio Infiernillo. So on the following day the expedition set forth with the legs of the convicts chained under their mules' bellies.

Ayacucho turned out *en masse* to watch

the departure of so distinguished a cavalcade, and it might as well be admitted at once that none of the adventurers made so brave a showing or saluted the villagers with more graceful bows than did Cesare Ruano or Pablo Pasca. In fact, they divided the plaudits of the crowd about equally with the prefect, who kept murmuring to Pethwick—

"Not a bad stroke, Señor Pethwick, not a bad stroke."

The legs of the convicts were chained, naturally, to prevent any sudden leave-taking, but the plan held disadvantages. When one of the llama-packs became loosened, either the scientists had to bungle the job themselves or take the leg-cuffs off their prisoners and allow them to dismount and do it for them. This entailed endless unchaining and chaining, which quickly grew monotonous and at length was abandoned after the geographers had exacted a solemn pledge of the two cutthroats not to run away. That much of the contract the guides kept to the letter. They never did run away, although the company lost them.

M. Demetriovich retained the manacles on the horn of his saddle, where, he told Pethwick, he hoped their jingle would have good moral effect.

Oddly enough both the convicts were entirely innocent of the charges preferred against them, upon which they were convicted and so nearly executed.

Pablo Pasca told the whole circumstance to Pethwick. He, Pablo, did meet an old man one freezing July night in a mountain pass on the road to Ayacucho. They stopped and held some converse and Pablo had borrowed from him two hundred and forty-seven sols. Then what did this ingrate of a creditor do but beat his head against a tree, break an arm, go before a *magistrado* and charge Pasca with highway robbery.

Pablo's black eyes flashed as he related the incident. He had been amazed at such calumny, which he could not disprove. The jury believed the old wretch and sentenced Pablo to the garrote.

However, the One Who Ruled the Earth knew the truth, and Pasca prayed every night that he should not have his spinal cord snapped on such an unjust charge. So the One Who Ruled sent this society of fine gentlemen and scholars to fraternize with Pablo and to lift him to an exalted station. So he, Pablo supposed now all the neighbors saw that his oath, as strange as it sounded, was true to the last jot and tittle. The padre in his visits to the *carcel* had taught Pablo a little verse which he should never forget—"Seest thou a man diligent in his profession—he shall sit before kings."

Cesare Ruano did not go so much into detail as did his fellow guide and friend, but he told Pethwick that the crime for which he was sentenced to the garrote was trivial and with a shrug of his shoulders he let it go at that.

The trivial affair, however, had left a number of marks on Ruano's person, all of which the Ayacucho police had tabulated. A copy of this table was given M. Demetriovich in order that he might advertize for Cesare in case he should desert.

Pethwick read the inventory. It ran:

Cesare Ruano, a *cholo*, 27 years, reddish yellow, height 5 ft. 7 in., weight 84 kilos (189 lbs.), muscular, broad face, prominent cheekbones, straight nose with wide nostrils, very white teeth, handsome. Scars: from right eyebrow through the right cheek to lobe of ear; from left side of neck to middle of chestbone; horizontal scar from nipple to nipple; rifle or pistol wound in right leg, two inches above knee; three buckshot in back, one in left buttock; little toe on left foot missing. Disposition: uncommunicative, but of pleasant address and cheerful until irritated. A very handy man. Note: In case of arrest, officers are advised to shoot before accosting Ruano.

On the first few nights the travelers found lodgings at little mountain inns, whose red peaked roofs of tiles were pulled down like caps over tiny eye-like windows. The tunnel-like entrance to such a hostelry always looked like a black mouth squared in horror at something it saw across the mountains.

This was much the same expression that the proprietor and guests wore when they learned the travelers were bound for the Rio Infiernillo.

Pablo Pasca always broke the news of their destination in rather dramatic style to the gamesters and hangers-on with which these centers of mountain life were crowded.

"Señores," he would harangue, "you see before you a man sentenced to death; but because no garrote could affect his throat, so hard has it become from drinking gin, the prefect decided to send him on a journey to the Rio Infiernillo! Let us drink to our good fortune!"

This announcement usually brought roars of applause and laughter. Once a roisterer shouted—

"But your companions; what caused them to be sent?"

And Pablo answered them with a droll gesture—

"One is a murderer; the rest are Americans!"

It made a great hit. The crowd invited Pablo to share its brandy.

HOWEVER, after these introductions the landlord would presently stop laughing and after some questions invariably warned the scientists against their "mad undertaking." On two such occasions the proprietor became so earnest and excited that he begged the *señores* to walk out with him up the mountain-side to see for themselves the terrors that confronted them.

Pethwick never forgot his first glimpse of the mystery that colored his thoughts and dreams for the remainder of his life.

The night was clear but moonless. The party climbed uncertainly in darkness up a scarp of boulders and spurs of primitive rock. The landlord picked his way toward a clump of calisaya trees silhouetted against the sky. The chill air was shot with the fragrance of mountain violets. The climbers lent each other hands until the landlord reached a protruding root and then everybody scrambled up.

Pethwick dropped down breathless at the foot of the tree, his heart beating heavily, for he was unaccustomed to the altitude. At first he was faintly amused at his host's promise of a portent, but this amusement vanished presently amid the solemnity of night and the mountains.

The very stars above him wore the strange aspect of the Southern constellations. Against their glimmer the Andes heaved mighty shoulders. Peak beyond peak, they stood in cold blackness, made more chill and mysterious by the pallor of snow fields.

The whole group shivered in silence for several minutes. At last M. Demetriovich asked with a shake in his Spanish—

"Well, *amigo,* what is there to see?"

"Wait," begged the landlord.

At that moment a star shot far out against the blackness.

"Alla!" gasped the Peruvian.

Pethwick shivered and grinned. He had brought them up to see a shooting star.

"But wait!" begged the host, sensing the engineer's mirth.

Almost at once from where the star seemed to strike arose a faint glowing haze as indefinite as the Milky Way. It must have been miles distant. In front of it two or three massifs were outlined and others, farther away, were dimly truncated by its radiance.

The *huesped* drew a long breath.

"Now there lies the Rio Infiernillo," he chattered. "It is a land from which no man returns alive. I have known many men to go, *señores,* thinking surely there must be great treasure where so much danger lay—and there may be, *señores.* No man can say. Every man has his opinion about the matter. I will tell frankly what mine is—"

He paused, evidently waiting for some one to urge his opinion.

Instead, Standifer spoke up—

"My opinion is it's a meteor and a phosphorescent display which sometimes follows."

The landlord laughed through the darkness with immense scorn of such a puerile opinion.

"What is yours?" inquired Pethwick.

"Señores," defined the tavern-keeper solemnly, "that stream is called the Rio Infiernillo for a very good reason. For there every night comes the devil to dig gold to corrupt the priests and—and, of course, the Protestants, too," he added charitably. "But he can never do it, *señores.* Let him dig till he scoops down the mountains and reaches his own country, which is the source of the Rio Infiernillo—he will never do it!"

"Has anyone ever seen where he has dug?" asked Pethwick, amused again.

"Si, señor."

"In the valley?"

"Precisamente, señor."

"I thought you said no one ever went over there and got back alive," observed Pethwick carelessly.

A slight pause; then the landlord explained.

"This man only lived a few minutes after he fell into my door. I saw him. His hair was white. He was burned. I heard his last words. No one else heard him."

This was uttered with such solemnity that Pethwick never knew whether it was an account of some weird tragedy of the mountains or whether it was cut out of whole cloth.

That night after Pethwick had gone to bed in the upper story of the hostelry, while the laughing and drinking flowed steadily below, it occurred to him that it was odd, after all, that the landlord should have led them on such a clamber to see a shooting star and a haze—and the two phenomena should have occurred so promptly.

* * *

On the following night another landlord led them out on the same mission and showed them the same set of wonders. His explanation was even more fantastic than the first.

Before the party retired that second night, Pethwick asked of M. Demetriovich—

"Professor, what is the probability that two meteors should perform the same evolutions in the same quarter of the sky and apparently strike in about the same place on two nights in succession?"

"I'd thought of that problem," returned the savant, yawning. "In fact, I have set down some tentative figures on the subject." Here

he referred to a little note-book. "It is roughly one chance in two million."

"Small," observed Pethwick.

"That was for the stars alone. For two stars to fall in the same region, each time followed by a phosphorescence, diminishes the probability to one chance in eight trillion."

Pethwick whistled softly.

"In fact, it was not a meteorite we saw," concluded the professor, crawling into bed.

Chapter Two

PABLO PASCA shouted something from perhaps a hundred yards up the trail. He was hidden from the string of toiling riders by a fold in the precipice. Pethwick looked ahead and saw two vultures launch themselves out over the abyss. One swung back down the face of the mountain and passed within forty feet of the party, its feathers whistling, its bald, whitish head turning for a look at the intruders and its odor momentarily tainting the cold wind.

A moment later the engineer saw the two guides had dismounted and their mules were snorting and jerking on the very edge of the precipice. The men themselves were staring at something and Pasca seemed almost as panic-stricken as the animals. The unquietness spread rapidly down the string of baggage-carriers.

Pethwick slid off his mount and hurried forward, slipping inside the llamas and mules. He came out by the side of Pablo to a queer, not to say gruesome sight.

In the air circled eight or ten vultures. They had been frightened from a row of skeletons, which evidently were articulated on wires and iron rods and stood before the travelers in the awkward postures such objects assume. Among the things Pethwick recognized the whitened frames of a snake, condor, sheep, vicuna, puma, monkey and at the end, standing upright, the bones of a man.

The specimens were accurately spaced around the end of the trail. The skulls grinned fixedly at the DeLong Geographical Expedition. In the gusty wind the arm of the man swung and beat against his thigh bone in a grotesque travesty of mirth.

Something touched Pethwick from behind. He turned with a shudder and saw Standifer. The secretary of the expedition looked at the assemblage for a moment, then drew out his note-book and pen, gave the pen a fillip to start a flow of ink and methodically jotted down the list before him. When he had finished he glanced up inquiringly as he rescrewed the top on his writing instrument.

"Don't suppose anyone is moving a museum, eh, Pethwick?"

"No," said the engineer, studying the figures.

"You don't think so?" surprised.

"Certainly not!"

"Huh!" Standifer drew forth his book again. "Makes a sort of little mystery of it, doesn't it?"

And he jotted this fact down.

Prof. Demetrivich joined his companions as the secretary made his observation on the probable source of the objects before them.

"Standifer's hypothesis is not as bad as it sounds, Pethwick," observed the savant.

"You don't mean these really belong to some scientist?" cried the engineer.

"I think their arrangement proves it."

The engineer looked at the professor curiously.

"These skeletons are arranged in the order of their evolutionary development."

A glance showed this to be the case and it rather surprised Pethwick.

"Does that hold any significance?"

M. Demetriovich walked over to the frame of the puma and shook it slightly as he inspected it.

"It would suggest a scientist arranged these specimens. A savage or a rustic would have been more likely to have strung them out according to size, or else he would have mixed them higgledy-piggledy, and the probability that he would have hit on their evolutionary order would have been remote indeed." The professor gave the puma's bones another shake. "Besides that, this articulation is very cleverly done—too cleverly for unpractised hands."

"But why should a scientist leave his specimens out like this?" demanded the engineer in amazement.

"To begin with, this seems to be the end of the trail—the shipping-point, so to speak, and for the further reason that water boils at a very low temperature at this altitude."

As the professor's fingers had touched some particles of flesh still adhering to the puma's vertebrae, he stepped across into a little patch of snow, stooped and washed his hands in it.

His two companions stared at him.

"Water boiling at a low temperature—altitude—what's that got to do with it?" interrogated the engineer.

The scientist smiled.

"I thought you would see that. If boiling water is too cool to clean the bones properly, here are some very trustworthy assistants above us."

M. Demetriovich indicated the vultures still circling overhead.

The secretary, who had been scribbling rap-

idly during the last part of this discourse, now crossed out a few lines on a former page with the remark—

"Well, there is no mystery to it after all."

"But look here," exclaimed Pethwick. "We're scooped!"

"What do you mean—scooped?" asked the old Rumanian.

"Somebody has beaten us to this field. There are rival explorers in these mountains.

"Tut, tut," chided the old man. "You should say, my dear Pethwick, we have 'colleagues' instead of 'rivals.' I am charmed to believe they are here. We must get in touch with them and try to be of assistance to them.

The kindly old scientist stared away among the great bluish peaks, speculating on where his "colleagues" could be.

"But look here," objected Standifer in alarm; "there will be another secretary with that expedition, grabbing all this literary material—"

"Lads, lads," reproached the old savant, "you have yet to learn the opulence of nature. She is inexhaustible. This party, another party, fifty parties toiling at the same time could never fathom all the marvels that lie under the sweep of our gaze. Why, gentlemen, for example, in Bucharest I and a colleague worked for three years on the relation of the olfactory system of catarrhine monkeys with that of human beings. Our effort was to approximate in what epoch the sense of smell became of secondary importance to humanity. This, of course, would mark a great change in the mode of living among men.

"As I say, we spent three years on the two nervous systems and yet our discoveries were most dissimilar. Now, what are a few white nerve-threads to all this wilderness of snow and boulders? Your fears are quite baseless."

HIS two companions laughed, half ashamed of their jealousy, and then inspected the scene before them, which up till now had been lost in the grizzly detail of the skeletons.

The mountainside on which they stood dropped away in an enormous declivity fully a mile and a half deep and led into a vast and sinister valley that stretched toward the northeast until its folds and twists were lost among the flashing peaks.

The extraordinary part of the scene was that instead of spreading the vivid green of the tropics below the tree-line this great depression looked black and burned. The ensemble recalled to Pethwick certain remarkable erosions he had seen in the West of the United States. Only here, the features were slashed out with a gigantism that dwarfed our Western canyons and buttes.

And there was another striking difference. In the North American West the Grand Canyon, the Yosemite, glow with a solemn beauty. This chasm looked like the raw and terrible wound of fire. Its blackened and twisted acclivities might have been the scars of some terrible torment.

A river lay through the center of this cicatrix and although later it proved nearly half a mile wide it was reduced to a mere rivulet amid such cyclopean setting. It twisted in and out, now lost to view, now shimmering in the distance, everywhere taking the color of its surroundings and looking for the world like one of those dull, spreading adders winding through the valley, poison from fang to sting.

Pethwick now fully understood why the Indians had given the peculiar name to the river. It was a sobriquet any human being would have bestowed upon it at first glimpse. It required no guide to tell Pethwick he was looking down upon the Rio Infiernillo.

"This is the place, *señor*," said Pablo Pasca. "Do we start back from here?"

Pethwick looked at him in surprise. "We'll spend the next sixty days in this valley."

"I mean Cesare and myself, *señor*," explained the Zambo in hangdog fashion.

"You and Cesare!"

"We have showed you the Valley of the Rio Infiernillo—that was all we promised, *señor*," pursued Pablo doggedly.

Ruano glanced around. "Speak for yourself, Pablo!"

"You are not going on into this den of Satan, are you?" cried Pablo to the murderer. "Past these—these—" He nodded at the skeletons.

Ruano grinned, showing two rows of big white teeth. "I'll go help make some more skeletons" he said carelessly.

Pethwick began to explain away Pasca's fears.

"Those are nothing but the specimens of a scientific expedition, Pablo."

"Do scientific expeditions collect skeletons?" shuddered the thief.

"Yes."

"Will you do that?"

"Very probably."

"And leave them for the birds to pick?"

"If we don't boil them." Pethwick grew more amused as the fears of the guide mounted.

"*Mio Dios!* What for?"

"To study them," laughed the engineer.

Pablo turned a grayish yellow.

"And you kill men, and let the buzzards pick their bones—to study them!" aspirated the half-breed. "Will you kill me—and Ruano?"

"Certainly not!" ejaculated Pethwick, quite shocked. "What a silly idea!"

"But the other gang did, *señor,*" cried the Zambo, nodding at the skeleton of the man at the end of the line, "and no doubt, *señor,* they told their guide that all was well, that everything was as it should be, until one fine day—pang!

"And here he stands, grinning at me, slapping his knees to see another big fool go spraddling down the scarp."

At such a hideous suspicion all three scientists began a shocked denial.

What did Pablo take them for—ghouls? They were civilized men, scientists, professors, engineers, authors.

"Then why did you choose for guides two men condemned to death unless it was to kill them and stay within the law?"

They reassured the robber so earnestly that he was half convinced, when unfortunately an extra gust of wind set the skeleton clapping his knee again.

The gruesome mirth set Pablo almost in a frenzy.

"Ehue! Yes! But how did the other party get their man? He came from somewhere! No doubt they found a dead man in this devil's country! Oh, yes; dead men are frequent in this place where men never go! They didn't kill their guide to study his bones. Oh, no! Not at all! Ha! No! He dropped dead. Very reasonable! Ho!"

With a yell he dropped his mule's rein and leaped for the mouth of the trail.

BUT Cesare Ruano was quicker than the thief. The murderer made one leap, caught the flying Zambo by the shoulder and brought him in a huddle on the stones.

The robber shrieked, screamed, began a chattering prayer.

"Oh, Holy Mary! Blessed Virgin! Receive my soul! I am to be killed! Blessed Queen, save me!"

The words seemed to arouse some sort of anger in Cesare, for the big fellow shook Pablo till his teeth rattled.

"Shut up squeaking, you rabbit! Can't you tell when a man is about to murder you? These are gentlemen! You will stay with this party, coward, and do the work! You will help me! I will not leave them and neither will you. *Sabe?*"

As he accented this *"Sabe?"* with a violent shake, Pablo's head nodded vigorously whether he wanted it to or not.

Oddly enough this trouncing seemed to reassure Pasca more than all the arguments of the scientists.

"You are a shrewd man, Cesare," he gasped as soon as he was allowed to speak. "Are you sure they won't hurt us?"

Ruano laughed again, with a flash of teeth.

"They can't hurt me. I could mash these little men with my thumb. Who are you afraid of, Pablo—the old, gray man who can hardly walk?"

"Why, no," admitted the thief, looking at M. Demetriovich.

"Or of that bean-pole boy, whose head is so weak he can not remember the simplest thing without writing it in a book?"

"Nor him either," agreed Pablo with a glance at Standifer.

"Or the engineer who can not lift a hand without gasping for breath?"

"Anyway," argued Pasca, half convinced, "how did those other geographers manage to kill their guide? Perhaps they shot him when he was asleep."

"They were not geographers," snapped Ruano; "at least they were not like these men."

"How do you know?"

"Could another such a party be in the mountains and all the country not hear of it? Even in prison we heard the great American scientists were going to the Rio Infiernillo. Then take these men—would they tie all these bones together if they wanted to pack them on llamas to Ayacucho? You know they would not. They would take them apart and put them in sacks until they reached America."

"Why, that's a fact," agreed Pasca, staring at the skeletons with new interest. "Certainly no llama would carry one of those things." He stared a moment longer and added: "But perhaps those other scientists were also fools and did not think of that."

"Then they would not have had wit enough to kill their guide. It takes some wit to kill a man, Pablo, I assure you."

Naturally the geographers had been listening to this very candid opinion of their party. Now M. Demetriovich inquired, not without a certain respect in his voice:

"Señor Ruano, I may be wrong in my judgment. How do you think those skeletons came here?"

"Señor," returned the convict respectfully, "this is the Rio Infiernillo. I think the devil put them here to scare men away, so they can not look into hell while they are alive. Because if they had a look, *señor,* it would be so horrible they would change their lives, become good men and go to heaven—and so the devil would lose patronage."

Standifer, who was chagrined with Ruano's description of himself, grunted out the word "barbarous." Pethwick shouted with laughter.

With a blush Standifer drew out his note-

book. As he did so, he remarked to Cesare:

"These entries are made, not because I lack intelligence, as you seem to think, but because I am the official secretary of this expedition; besides I am an author. I wrote a book called "Reindeer in Iceland."

A fit of coughing seized Pethwick.

"I meant nothing by what I said, Señor Standifer," explained Ruano, "except to hearten this rabbit. Think nothing of it." He turned to the crowd as a whole. "We will never get the mules and llamas past the skeletons, so we will have to remove the skeletons past the mules and llamas."

This plan recommended itself to the whole party and everybody set to work. The men lugged the things past the trembling animals and finally lined them up behind the cavalcade. They placed the human frame at the head of the troop, just as they had found it.

As Pethwick rode away he looked back at it. There it stood representing the summit of creation, the masterpiece of life. It rattled its phalanges against its femur and grinned a long-toothed grin at the vast joke of existence—an evolutionary climb of a hundred million years, a day or two of sunshine, a night or two of sleep, a little stirring, and a little looking around, and—*poof!* back it was where it had started a hundred million years ago. No wonder skeletons grin.

ON THE forward journey it transpired that Cesare Ruano had obtained a sort of moral ascendency over the whole party.

He certainly had set the crowd straight about the skeletons. They had tried for an hour to decide where they came from and in half a dozen words Cesare proved to them they knew nothing about the matter whatsoever.

Another thing that gave Cesare prestige was his abrupt quelling of Pasca's desertion. Without Cesare the Zambo would have escaped. None of the scientists would have acted in time to stop his headlong flight.

Civilization had the unfortunate effect of slowing up men's mental operations in emergencies. Indeed, civilization places such a premium on foresight that a civilized man lacks ability to live from instant to instant. The ordinary American lives usually in next month or next year, but he is rarely at home in the "now" and "here."

This quality of concentration on the future is a splendid thing for developing inventions, building great businesses, painting great pictures, writing novels and philosophies, but it works badly indeed for guarding convicts, who invariably bolt in the present tense.

Cesare used his new authority to possess himself of a rifle.

"We don't know just who shot that skeleton," he explained very simply to M. Demetriovich, "and we don't know how many more skeletons the fellow may want. I prefer to keep mine. Now I have observed that you *señores* never glance about when you travel, but look straight into your mules' ears and think of many great things, no doubt. But this fellow could collect your skeletons very easily. So I will take a rifle and ride before and shoot whoever it is before he shoots us."

Ruano chose Standifer's rifle for this task. The secretary was glad of it, for the weapon had been chafing his leg ever since the party left Ayacucho.

The immediate declivity leading into the valley of the Rio Infiernillo was a field of boulders ranging in size from a man's head to a house. Far below them the tree-line was marked by some small trees that had been tortured by the wind into the grotesque shapes worked out by the Japanese in their dwarf trees. Here and there patches of snow disguised their precarious footing into white pitfalls.

The mules crept downward, exploring every step of the way with their little hoofs, then easing their weight forward. It made a very swaying, chafing ride. Pethwick's pommel worked against his stomach until he felt he had been sitting down a week, wrong side first.

After an endless jostle it seemed to the engineer that he was not descending in the slightest, but was being shaken back and forth, sticking in one place amid the cyclopean scenery. When he looked back, the endless boulder-field slanted toward the sky; when he looked down, it seemed as far as ever into the black and sinister valley where the river wound like an adder.

He looked to reaching the tree-line with a hope it would bring him relief from the monotony. It did not. His saddle chafed, his mule sagged and swayed. His fellow scientists did as he was doing, squirmed about on the torturing saddle-horns. The sameness drove his mind in on itself. He began as Cesare had said, "to stare into his mule's ears and think."

He wondered about the skeletons. He wondered what "trivial" thing Cesare had done to get sentenced to the garrote. He wondered what that shooting star and the phosphorescent mist could have been. Then he wondered about the skeletons again . . about Cesare . . .

A rifle-shot that sounded like a mere snap in the thin mountain air disturbed his reflections. He looked up and saw a faint wisp of vapor float out of the .30-30 in Cesare's hands. The engineer glanced about anxiously to see if the murderer had shot any of his compan-

ions. They were all on their mules and all looking at each other and at him. Everyone in the crowd had felt instinctively that the desperado had fired at some person—possibly at one of his own party.

"Who is it?" cried Standifer.

"A man down yonder!" Pablo pointed.

"I don't know whether it was a man or not!" cried Ruano, jumping from his slow mule and setting off down the declivity at a hazardous run.

"Ruano!" shouted M. Demetriovich in horror. "Did you shoot at a human being like that? Drop that rifle, you bloodthirsty fellow! Drop it!"

Extraordinary to say, Cesare did drop his gun and as it struck the stones it fired again. The man plunged on downward at full tilt. It was an amazing flight. He took the boulders like a goat. The party stopped their mounts and sat watching the dash.

"Did you say it was a man?" asked the secretary shakily of Pablo.

"As sure as I am sitting here." At that moment, the flying Ruano swung in behind a huge boulder.

"He was behind that!" cried Pablo sharply. Then he lifted his voice. "Did you get him, Cesare?" he shouted. "Was there any money on him?"

But almost immediately Pethwick glimpsed the murderer again, in fact, saw him twice—or he may have caught a flash of two figures, one chasing the other.

* * *

Suddenly Pablo began yelling as if on a fox-course.

A shock of horror went through Pethwick. He knew too well what the convict would do if he caught the man. Nobody could waylay Cesare Ruano, even to look at him in safety.

"Here, let's get down there!" cried the engineer in urgent tones. "Lord, we ought not to have given that brute a gun!"

"Maybe he hit him!" surmised Pablo in cheerful excitement.

"He's chasing him this minute somewhere behind those boulders!" declared Standifer nervously.

M. Demetriovich dismounted and from between two boulders recovered Standifer's rifle as they passed it.

Pethwick had screwed up his nerves for some dreadful sight behind the boulder, but there was nothing there. Nothing except a splotch of green liquid on the stones.

Smaller gouts of this green fluid led off down the boulder-field, making from one large boulder to another as if some dripping thing had tried to keep a covert between itself and the party of riders.

Pethwick dismounted and followed this trail perhaps a hundred yards, until it ceased. Then he stood looking about him in the cold sunshine. He could not hear the slightest sound. The blackened valley and the Infernal River lay far below him. High above him, at the end of the trail, the vultures wheeled against the sky.

Chapter Three

FROM his headlong pursuit down the mountain-side Cesare Ruano never returned.

What became of him none of his companions ever discovered. He dropped out of their lives as suddenly and completely as if he had dissolved into air.

A dozen possibilities besieged their brains. Perhaps he fell over a cliff. Or was drowned in the river. Or he may have deserted the expedition. Perhaps he was still wandering about, lost or crazed. Perhaps the man he pursued turned and killed him.

All these were pure conjectures, for they had not a clue upon which to base a rational hypothesis. The only hope for a suggestion, the green splotches on the boulders, proved to be hopeless riddles themselves.

The men picked up several of the smaller boulders and when camp was pitched Prof. Demetriovich made a chemical analysis of the stain. Its coloring-matter was derived from chlorophyll. If Ruano's shot had penetrated the stomach of some ruminating animal, it was barely possible for such a stain to have resulted—but it was improbable. This stain was free from cellular vegetal structure. In the mixture was no trace of the corpuscles or serum of blood.

On the afternoon of the second day following the incident, the men sat at the dinner-table discussing the matter.

In the tent beside the rude dining-table were cots and another table holding specimens, mineral, floral and some insects. Two or three books were scattered on the cots and duffle-bags jammed the tent corners.

Looking out through the flaps of their tent, the diners could see the eastern peaks and cliffs of the Infernal Valley turning orange under the sunset.

M. Demetriovich was talking.

"I consider the chlorophyll an added proof that there is another scientific expedition in this valley."

"What is your reasoning?" inquired Pethwick.

"Chlorophyll is a substance none but a chemist could, or rather would, procure. It serves no commercial purpose. Therefore it must be used experimentally."

"Why would a chemist want to experiment in this forsaken place?"

Standifer put in a question—

"Then you think Cesare shot a hole in a canister of chlorophyll solution?"

"When a man has a choice of improbabilities, all he can do is to choose the least improbable," explained M. Demetriovich friendlily.

"I wonder what Cesare would say about it?" speculated Pethwick.

"The green trail also suggests my theory," proceeded Prof. Demetriovich. "When Ruano shot the man behind the boulder, his victim evidently did not know that his can of solution had been punctured, for he sat hidden for perhaps a minute while his container leaked a large pool just behind the rock. When Cesare charged, the fellow fled, losing small quantities as the liquid splashed out. At last the man observed the puncture and turned the can over, and there the trail ended."

M. Demetriovich pushed his coffee cup toward Pablo without interrupting his deductions.

"I should say Cesare's bullet entered the can about an inch below the level of the liquid. That would explain why a continuous trail did not mark the fugitive."

"But why should one scientist be ambushing civilized men in a heaven-forsaken place like this!" cried Standifer in slightly supercilious tones. "And why should he carry a canister of chlorophyll around with him?"

Pethwick tapped the table with his fingers. "It's unfair to demand the fellow's occupation, race, color and previous condition of servitude," he objected. Then, after a moment: "I wish we could find Ruano—"

M. Demetriovich stirred his coffee and looked into it without drinking, a Latin habit he had formed in the Rumanian cafés.

"If I may be so bold, *señores*," put in Pablo Pasca, "a scientist—a lone scientist would go crazy in a place like this."

This remark, while as improbable as the other guesses, nevertheless spread its suggestion of tragedy over the situation.

"Nobody knows the action of chlorophyll exactly," brooded M. Demetriovich. "Somehow it crystallizes the energy in sunlight. If some man had developed a method to bottle the sun's energy directly, he would probably pursue his investigations in the tropics—"

"And he might desire secrecy," added Pethwick, "so much so that he would even—"

"You mean he would murder Cesare?" finished Standifer.

"A certain type of scientific mind might do that, gentlemen," agreed M. Demetriovich gravely.

"What sort, professor?"

"There are only a few countries in the world capable of producing a chemist who could experiment with chlorophyll and sunlight—"

The diners looked at the old scientist expectantly.

"Of course, I know only one country whose national creed is ruthlessness, only one whose chemists would kill an Indian on the bare possibility that the Indian might divulge his secret process—or his political affiliations."

"You mean he could be a German royalist?" queried Pethwick.

"If the Germans could synthesize the sun's energy and thus transform it directly into food, they would certainly be in a position to bid again for world dominion," stated M. Demetriovich positively. "It would annul a blockade of the seas. It would render unnecessary millions of men working in the fields and put them on the battlefront."

"But that's fantastic, professor!" cried Pethwick. "That's getting outside of probability."

"The green splotches themselves are outside of probability, Mr. Pethwick," stated the old savant gravely, "but they are here nevertheless."

"The moon is rising," observed Standifer casually.

The secretary's silly and trivial breaks in the conversation irritated Pethwick. He turned and said—

"Well, that doesn't bother me, does it you?"

"Oh, no," said Standifer, taking the rather tart remark in good faith. "I like to watch the moon rise. If I may say, all my best literary ideas are evolved under the moonlight."

"Trot on out and see if you can't think up something good," suggested the engineer.

Standifer caught this sarcasm, flushed slightly but did get up and walk out through the tent entrance. A moment later the two men followed him, leaving the things to Pablo.

THE rising moon centered their attention with the first glint of its disk between two peaks far down the valley. The last bronze of twilight lingered in the west. The men shivered with the chill of the coming night.

Despite Pethwick's jibe at the poetical in-

fluence of the moon as expressed by the secretary, still the engineer felt it himself.

"It looks whiter, more silvery in this latitude," he observed after a continued silence.

"That mist about it looks like the veil of a bride," mused the author.

"May do it," said the engineer, who despised similes, "but it looks more like a mist around the moon."

"What's the matter with you anyway, Pethwick?" snapped Standifer, wheeling around. "Just because you lack the gift of poetical expression is no reason you should make an ass of yourself and bray every time I utter a well-turned phrase!"

"Was that what you were doing?" inquired the older man.

"It was, and if—"

Standifer broke off suddenly and stared, then in amazement gasped—

"For Heaven's sake!"

"What is it?" Both the older men followed his gaze.

Standifer was staring into the fading sky utterly bewildered.

Pethwick shook him.

"What is it?"

The secretary pointed skyward.

They followed his finger and saw against the dull west the delicate silver crescent of a new moon.

It required half an instant for the incoherence of their two observations to burst upon them. The next impulse, all three turned.

The full moon they had seen rising in the east had disappeared. The mist, a phosphorescent mist, still hung about the peaks; indeed, it seemed to settle on the distant crags and cliffs and glow faintly in the gathering darkness. It defined a sort of spectral mountain-scape. Then, before their astounded gaze, it faded into darkness.

A scratching sound caused Pethwick to shiver. It was Pablo Pasca striking a match inside the tent.

* * *

After his observation of what for want of a better name will have to be called the pseudo-moon, a curious mental apathy fell over Pethwick. Not that he failed to think of the extraordinary series of events that had befallen the expedition. He did think of them all the time. But he thought weakly, hopelessly. He picked up the problem in his brain without the slightest hope of finding the solution. He exhaused himself on the enigma, and yet he could not let it go.

He tried to forget it and center himself on his work. But little mysteries cropped out in his every day toil. His principal duty with the expedition was map-making, the determination of the altitudes of the various observed peaks, and a mapping of the outcrops of the black micas, limonites, serpentines, pitchblendes, obsidians and hornblendes. It was these dark-colored stones, he found, that gave the great chasm its look of incineration.

And this is what he did not understand. Here and there he found places where streams of lava sprang, apparently, out of the solid escarpment of the cliffs.

Now the whole Peruvian sierras are volcanic and these lava pockets did not surprise Pethwick. The inexplicable part was that no volcanic vent connected these little fumaroles with the interior of the mountain. They seemed to have been burned from the outside. They looked as if some object of intense heat had branded the mountainside.

Ordinarily Pethwick's mind would have sprung like a terrier at such a problem; now, through sheer brain-fag, he jotted the descriptions without comment. In this dull, soulless way he made the following extraordinary entry into his journal one morning:

This morning, close to one of those burned pockets, or fumaroles, which I have before described, I found a roasted rabbit. The little animal was some twelve feet from the fumarole, sitting upright on its haunches—and roasted. It looked as if its curiosity had been aroused, and it had been cooked instantly. As decomposition had not set in, it could not have been dead for more than a week.

I wonder if this is a tab on the date of these fumaroles? If so, they must have been burned a few days ago, instead of being of geologic antiquity, as I at first assumed. If recent, they must be of artificial origin. Since they roast a rabbit before frightening it, they must occur with the abruptness of an explosion. Can these splotches be connected with the evil mystery surrounding this expedition? I can not say. I have no theory whatever.

That evening at dinner Pethwick showed this entry to M. Demetriovich. The old Rumanian read it, and his only comment was a nod and a brief—"Yes, I had discovered they were of recent origin myself."

Presently he suggested a game of chess to take their minds off the matter before they retired.

"You look strained, Pethwick," said the old man.

The engineer laughed briefly.

"I am strained. I'm jumpy every minute of the day and night."

The old savant considered his friend with concern.

"Wouldn't you better get out of here for a while, Herbert?"

"What's the use? I could think of nothing else."

"You would feel out of danger."

"I don't feel in danger."

"Yes, you do—all mystery connotes danger. It suggests it to us. That is why mystery is so stimulating and fascinating."

"Do you think we are in danger?"

"I am sure the man who killed Cesare would not hesitate over us."

Standifer, who was seated at the table, began to smile in a superior manner at their fears.

Owing to the engineer's nervous condition this irritated Pethwick acutely. However, he said nothing about it, but remarked to M. Demetriovich—

"Tomorrow I am through with my work right around here."

"Then you'll take a rest, as I suggest."

"No, I'll take a pack, walk straight down this valley and find out what is making these fumaroles—and what became of Cesare."

At that moment, in the gathering blue of night, the eastern sky was lighted by the glare of the pseudo-moon. Its pallor poured in through the tent-flaps and the shadows of the men's legs streaked the floor.

The mystery brought both the older men to the outside. They stared at the illumination in silence. The light was as noiseless as the aurora.

As they watched it, Pethwick heard Standifer laughing inside the tent.

The secretary's idiocy almost snapped the engineer's control. He wanted to knock his empty head. At last the phenomenon died away and left its usual glimmer on the surrounding heights. In a few minutes this vanished and it was full night.

WHEN the men reentered the tent Standifer still smiled as if he enjoyed some immunity from their mystification and nervousness.

"Well, what's the joke?" asked Pethwick at last.

"The way you fellows go up in the air about this thing."

"You, I suppose, are on solid ground!" exploded Pethwick.

The author said nothing but continued his idiotic smile.

"I admit there are points here and there I don't understand," continued Pethwick after a moment. "No doubt we fail to understand it as thoroughly as you do."

"You do," agreed Standifer with such matter-of-factness the engineer was really surprised.

"What in the devil have you found out?" he asked irritably.

"Oh, the facts, the facts," said Standifer nonchalantly. "I'm a writer, you know, a trained observer; I dive to the bottom of things."

Pethwick stared, then laughed in a chattery fashion—

"Y-yes, I see you diving to the bottom of this—"

The old professor, who had been studying the secretary, quietly interrupted—

"What do you know, James?"

The literary light hesitated a moment, then drew a handful of glittering metal out of his pocket and plunked it down on the table.

"I know all about it," he said and grinned in spite of himself.

The men stared. Pablo Pasca paused in his journeys to and from the kitchen tent to stare at the boy and the gold.

"Know all about what?" cut in Pethwick jumpily. "The gold or the mystery?"

"Both."

Suddenly Pablo cried—

"I told you, *señores,* wealth lies where danger is so great!"

"Have you found a gold mine?" asked M. Demetriovich.

"No, I sold one of my books."

"Who to—when—where—my Lord; who was the sucker?" Pethwick's questions almost exploded out of him.

"I had no idea my book had such a reputation," beamed the author.

"Youngster, if you'll just cut the literary twaddle—" quavered Pethwick, on edge.

"Well, I had a hunch there must be some very simple explanation for all this skull and cross-bone stuff you fellows were trying to pull. You know that doesn't go in real life. It's only fiction, that resort of the mentally muddled—"

"Standifer! Spill it—if you know anything!"

"Go on, tell it in your own way, Mr. Standifer," encouraged M. Demetriovich. "You were saying 'mentally muddled.' "

"Sure—yes—well, nothing to it, you know. This life is very simple, once you get the key."

"Lord—doesn't that sound like 'Reindeer in Iceland'!" ground out the engineer.

"What was the light we saw just then, Mr. Standifer?" inquired the savant, who saw that the secretary would never get anywhere unaided.

"A new sort of portable furnace, sir, that extracts and reduces ores on the spot."

"Who runs it?"

"Indians."

"Have you seen any of them?"

"Saw one not three hours ago. Sold him a copy of 'Reindeers in Iceland.'"

Pethwick interrupted the catechism.

"Gave you that much gold for a copy of 'Reindeer in Iceland'—for the whole edition of 'Reindeer in Iceland'!"

"Did you inquire about Cesare?" proceeded M. Demetriovich.

"Yes, he's working for them."

"Did you think to ask about the chlorophyll?"

"That's used in a secret process of extracting gold."

"You say the men engaged in such a method of mining are *Indians*?"

"The man I saw was an Indian."

"Did you talk to him in English, Spanish, Quicha? What language?"

The secretary hesitated.

"Well—in English, but I had to explain the language to him. I think he knew it once but had forgot."

"A lot of South Americans are educated in the States," observed Pethwick, who by now was listening intently.

"Tell us what happened, Mr. Standifer," requested the old Rumanian.

"WELL, today I was about twelve miles down the valley. I had sat down to eat my lunch when I saw an Indian behind a rock staring at me as if his eyes would pop out of his head. I don't mind admitting it gave me a turn, after the way things have been happening around here. On second glance I thought it was Cesare. I was about to yell when the fellow himself yelled at me—

" 'Hey, Cesare, is that you?'

"Well, it nearly bowled me over. But I got a grip on my nerves and shouted back, 'No, I'm not Cesare!' And I was about to ask who the fellow was when he took it right out of my mouth and shouted to me, 'Who are you?'

"I told him my name and address, that I was an author and secretary of the DeLong Geographical Expedition; then I asked him to come out and let's have a talk.

"The fellow came out all right, walking up to me, looking hard at me. He was an ordinary Indian with a big head and had on clothes about like Cesare's. In fact, you know it is hard to tell Indians apart. As he came up he asked me the very question I had in mind—

" 'Do you know Cesare?' "

"I said, 'Yes; where is he?'

"He stood looking at me and shook his head.

"I said, 'You don't know,' and he touched his mouth and laughed. Then I guessed that he didn't understand English very well, so I began explaining the language to him.

"He would point at something and say, 'Is that a bird? Is that a stone? Is that a river?' In each case he got it right, but there was always a hesitation, of about a second, perhaps, as if he were thinking, like this: 'Is that a—river?' "

Both the older men were staring intently at the boy as if they were trying to read something behind his words. Pethwick nodded impatiently.

"I am sure," continued Standifer, "the fellow once knew English and it was coming back to him."

"Undoubtedly," from Pethwick.

"Then he saw the corner of my book in my haversack, for I—I sometimes carry my book around to read when I'm lonely, and he said, 'What is that—"Reindeer in Iceland"?'

"That joggled me so, I said, 'Yes; how the deuce did you know that?'

"Well, at that he almost laughed himself to death and finally he said just about what was in my mind, 'That has a wider reputation than you imagine," and he added, 'What is it for?'

" 'What is what for?' says I.

" 'Reindeer in Iceland,' says he.

" 'To read,' says I. 'It contains facts,' says I. 'It's not like the rotten fiction you pick up.' And with that my whole spiel that I used to put up to the farmers in New York State when I sold my book from door to door came back to me. I thought what a lark it would be to try to sell a copy to an Indian in the Rio Infiernillo. 'If I do that,' I thought to myself, 'I'll be the star book-agent of both the Americas.'

So I began:

" 'It's not like the rotten fiction you buy,' says I. 'This volume gives you the truth about reindeer in Iceland; it tells you their food, their strength, their endurance, their value in all the different moneys of the world: It states where are the greatest herds. What reindeer hides are used for. How their meat, milk and cheese taste. How to prepare puddings from their blood. How the bulls fight. Their calls: their love-calls, danger-calls, hunger-calls. How their age may be calculated by the tines on their horns and the rings on their teeth and the set of their tails. In fact, sir,' said I, 'with this little volume in your pocket, it will be impossible for any man, no matter how dishonest he is, to palm off on you an old, decrepit reindeer under the

specious representation that he or she is young, agile and tender.

" 'The price of this invaluable compendium puts it within easy reach of one and all. It will prove of enormous practical and educational value to each and any. It makes little difference whether you mean to rear these graceful, docile animals or not; you need this volume, for as a means of intellectual culture it is unsurpassed. It contains facts, nothing but facts. You need it. Do you want it? Are you progressive? Its price is the only small thing about it—only fifty-four cents. Let me put you down.'

"With that, so strong is the force of habit, I whipped out an old envelope to take his order on.

" 'What is fifty-four cents?' he asked. 'Have I got fifty-four cents?'

" 'Just what I was wondering,' says I. 'Turn your pockets wrong side out and I'll see.'

"He turned 'em and spilled a lot of metals on the ground. I saw these pieces of gold and told him they would do. I told him I would give him all five of my volumes, for that is the number I brought on this trip, and I'm sorry now I didn't bring more.

"He just pushed the gold over to me without blinking an eye and we traded. I told him where we camped and he said tomorrow he would call and get the other four volumes. And, gentlemen, that is all I know."

AT THE end of this tale, Standifer leaned back, smiling with pleasure at his sale. The two men sat studying him. At last Pethwick asked—

"You say he knew the title of your book?"

"Yes."

"Was the title showing?"

"No, just a little corner stuck out of the knapsack."

Pethwick considered another moment.

"You first thought it was Cesare?"

"Yes."

"Did he have a scar on the side of his face?"

"No, I would have noticed that sure. Still, his face was painted very thickly."

"You are sure it wasn't Cesare?"

"Absolutely sure."

Here M. Demetriovich took up what might be called the cross-examination.

"You say he didn't understand English at first—could he read the book you sold him?"

"No, that was the odd part. I had to tell him what the letters were and how they made words; how words made sentences. But he caught on the moment I showed him anything and never forgot at all. I tried him."

M. Demetriovich paused.

"You are sure it was an Indian?"

"Yes."

"But he didn't know the value of gold?"

"Well, I don't know about that," began Standifer.

"Didn't you say he gave you all that money for five dinky little books!" stormed Pethwick.

"Yes, but that doesn't say he doesn't understand—"

"A gold-miner," interrupted M. Demetriovich, "who is so highly scientific as to employ chlorophyll in a secret process of extracting gold and yet who—doesn't know the value of gold!"

The secretary caressed his glittering pile happily, yawned and slipped it back into his pocket.

"Anyway, I wish I had a cartload of those books down here."

Pethwick sat on his stool clutching his knee to his breast, glaring at the author. Finally he gave a nervous laugh—

"I'm glad you've cleared up the mystery, Standifer."

"Yes; so am I," returned the secretary genially. "I was getting worried about it myself."

"I shouldn't think it would worry you, Standifer." Pethwick gave another shuddery laugh.

"I'm not going to worry," agreed the secretary heartily.

The engineer sat moistening his dry lips with his tongue while little shivers played through him.

"By the way," he asked after a moment, "did you think to inquire about those skeletons? Is that—cleared up, too?"

"Yes, I did. He said he put them up there to keep the animals away. He said you never knew what sort of animals were about and he didn't want any in till he was ready. He said he put one of every species he could find because each animal was afraid of the skeleton of its own dead."

M. Demetriovich sat gazing at the boy. A grayness seemed to be drawing over the old man.

"That's a fact," he nodded. "I'd never thought of it before—each animal is afraid of its dead. No skeleton shocks a human being except the skeleton of a man. I suppose it is true of the rest."

"Anyway, it's all cleared up now, Standifer," repeated the engineer with his chattering laugh. "It is as you say, Standifer; there are no mysteries outside of fiction."

He began laughing, shaking violently. His cachinnations grew louder and wilder. M. Demetriovich jumped out of his seat, hurried

over to his medicine-chest, fixed up a glass of something and with a trembling hand presented it to the engineer. Pethwick drank some and then the old man took a deep swallow himself.

"What's the matter?" asked the secretary, lifting a happy head.

"It's the reaction," shivered the engineer less violently. "You cleared up the mystery—so suddenly— Go on to sleep."

The boy dropped back to his pillow and was off instantly after his long walk.

The two older men sat staring at each other across the little table, their nerves calming somewhat under the influence of the sedative.

"Is it a lie," whispered Pethwick after a long thought, "to cover the discovery of gold?"

M. Demetriovich shook his head.

"That boy hasn't enough imagination to concoct a fragment of his fantastic tale. The thing happened."

"Then, in God's name, what is Cesare going to do to us tomorrow?"

"Cesare would never have given away all that gold," decided the old savant slowly.

"Unless—he means to recoup it all tomorrow."

M. Demetriovich shook his head.

"Cesare might have put on the paint—he could never have thought up such an elaborate mental disguise. That is far beyond him."

The two men brooded. At last the savant hazarded:

"It may be possible that the Bolsheviki have quit using gold. I believe there is a plan to use time-checks down in their socialistic program."

The engineer jumped another speculation, "The old Incans—sun-worshipers, who sacrifice living men to their deity—"

The two scientists sat in silence. From the ice-fields high above the chasm of the Rio Infiernillo came a great sighing wind. It breathed in on them out of the blackness; its cold breath chilled their necks, their hands, their wrists; it breathed on their ankles and spread under their trousers, chilling their knees and loins.

The men shivered.

Chapter Four

PETHWICK awoke out of some sort of nightmare about Incan sun-worshipers. He could hear the groans of victims about to be sacrificed and even after he had shuddered awake his sense of impending calamity persisted. He lifted himself on an elbow and stared about the tent. The sun shining straight into his face, no doubt, had caused his fantasy about the sun-worshipers.

He got to a sitting posture, yawning and blinking his eyes. Outside the day was perfectly still. A bird chirped querulously. In the corral he could hear the llamas snuffling. Then he heard repeated the groan that had disturbed him in his sleep. It came from the secretary's cot.

The engineer glanced across, then came fully awake. Instead of the young author, Pethwick saw an old, white-haired man lying in the cot with the back of his head showing past the blankets. The engineer stared at this thing blankly. A suspicion that Demetriovich and Standifer had changed cots passed through his mind, but a glance showed him the old savant still asleep on his proper bed.

The engineer got up, stepped across and leaned over this uncanny changeling. It took him a full half-minute to recognize, in a drawn face and white hair of the sleeper, the boy Standifer.

A shock went over the engineer. He put his hand on the author's shoulder.

"Standifer!" he shouted. "Standifer!"

As Standifer did not move, Pethwick called to the professor with an edge of horror in his voice.

The old savant sprang up nervously.

"What is it?"

"Here, look at this boy!"

The scientist stared from his cot, rubbed his eyes and peered.

"Is—is that Standifer?"

"Yes."

"What's happened to him?"

"I haven't the slightest idea, professor."

The scientist jabbed feet into slippers and came across the tent. He shook the sleeper gently at first, but gradually increased his energy till the cot squeaked and the strange white head bobbed on the pneumatic pillow.

"Standifer! Standifer!"

But the youth lay inert.

He stripped the covers and the underclothes off the young man. Standifer lay before them naked in the cold morning air; his undeveloped physique looked bluish; then, on the groin of his right leg, Pethwick noticed an inflamed splotch that looked like a severe burn.

M. Demetriovich turned to his medicine-chest and handed Pethwick an ammonia bottle to hold under the boy's nose while he loaded a hypodermic with strychnin solution. A moment later he discharged it into the patient's arm.

A shudder ran through Standifer at the

powerful stimulant. His breathing became better and after a bit he opened his eyes. He looked drowsily at the two faces bending over him and after a minute whispered—

"What's matter?"

"How do you feel?"

"Sleepy. Is it time to get up?"

"Do you ache—hurt?"

The secretary closed his eyes, evidently to take stock of his feelings.

"My head aches. My—my leg burns.

He reached down and touched the inflamed spot.

As the strychnin took firmer hold the boy became alert enough to show surprise at his own state. He eased his sore leg to the floor and sat up on the edge of the cot. Both his companions began a series of questions.

Standifer had no idea what was the matter with him. He had not bruised either his head or his leg. Nothing had happened to him through the night, that he recalled, nor on the preceding day. After a bit, he remembered the sale of his books and drew from under his pillow the gold which he had received.

A thought crossed Pethwick's mind that Pablo Pasca had crept in during the night and had assaulted the sleeper. Demetriovich took the bag and inspected it. He poured the yellow metal into his palm and examined it, smelled of it gingerly. Pethwick watched him with some curiosity.

"How did you bring this home yesterday afternoon, James?" the old man asked the young man.

The secretary thought.

"In my pocket.

"In your right trousers pocket?"

Standifer made a movement to place his right and left sides and said—

"Yes."

"Put on your trousers.

The youth did so, working his sore leg carefully inside.

"Put that gold in your pocket. Does it fall directly over the burn?"

Standifer cringed and got the metal out as quickly as possible.

"I should say so.

M. Demetriovich nodded.

"And you slept with the gold under your pillow last night for safekeeping?"

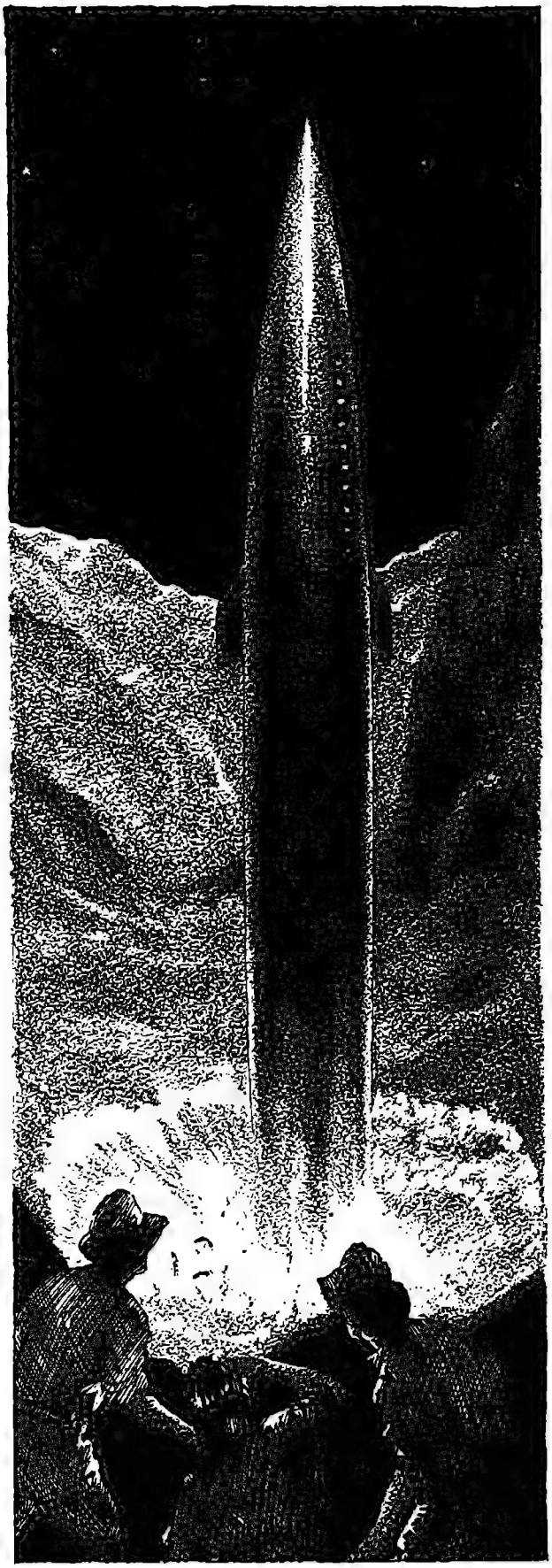
"Yes."

"Then that is what did it, diagnosed the scientist.

"But how can gold—"

"The stuff must be poisoned somehow. I'll see if I can find how."

The savant moved to the table containing his chemicals and test-tubes.



Quite suddenly from where the stern of the dirigible nested on the ground there broke out a light of insufferable brilliancy.

TO PETHWICK the idea of poisoned gold sounded more like the extravagances of the Middle Ages than a reality occurring in the twentieth century. The engineer stood beside the table and watched the professor pursue his reactions for vegetable and mineral poisons. Standifer limped to the engineer's side. In the silver bowl of an alcohol lamp, the boy caught a reflection of himself. He leaned down and looked at the tiny image curiously. At length he asked—

"Pethwick, is there anything the matter with my hair?"

Then Pethwick realized that the boy did not know his hair was white. And he found, to his surprise, that he hated to tell Standifer. He continued watching the experiment as if he did not hear.

Standifer took up the lamp and by holding its bowl close he got a fair view of his head. He gave a faint gasp and looked about for a mirror. At that instant M. Demetriovich took the only mirror on the table to condense a vapor floating out of a tube. The old man began talking quickly to the engineer.

"Pethwick, this is the cleverist destructive stroke that the Bolshevists have ever invented."

"What is it?"

"I still don't know, but they have poisoned this gold. They could probably do the same thing to silver. It makes the circulation of money deadly. It will perhaps cause the precious metals to be discarded as media of circulation."

The engineer looked incredulous.

"It's a fact. Do you recall how the report of ground glass in candies cut down the consumption of confectionery? If a large body of men should persistently poison every metal coin that passes through their hands—who would handle coins? Why, gentlemen," he continued as the enormity of the affair grew on him, "this will upset our whole commercial system. It will demonetize gold. No wonder that scoundrel offered our secretary so much gold for a book or two! He wanted to test his wares."

The old man's hand trembled as he poured a blue liquid from one test tube to another.

"I am constrained to believe that in this Valley of the Infernal River we are confronted with the greatest malignant genius mankind has ever produced."

"Why should he want to demonetize gold?" interrupted Pethwick.

"It will force mankind to adopt a new standard of value and to use an artificial medium of exchange—'labor-hour checks,' perhaps, whose very installation will do more to socialize the world than any other single innovation."

The two friends stood watching him anxiously. "You can't find what they do it with?"

"Not a trace so far. It seems to defy analysis."

"Notice," observed Pethwick, "your electroscope is discharged."

M. Demetriovich glanced at the gold-leaf electroscope and saw that its tissue leaves were wilted.

Suddenly Standifer interrupted:

"Pethwick, is my hair white? Did that stuff turn my hair white?" He seized the mirror. "Look! Look!" he cried out of nervous shock and a profound wounded vanity.

The engineer turned with genuine sympathy for the author, but in turning he saw a man standing in the entrance, watching the excitement with a slight smile.

The engineer paused abruptly, staring.

The stranger was a medium-sized Indian with an abnormally developed head and a thickly painted face. He wore the usual shirt and trousers of a *cholo* and for some reason gave Pethwick a strong impression of Cesare Ruano. Why he resembled Cesare, Pethwick could not state, even after he had inspected him closely. To judge from the Indian's faintly ironic expression, he must have been observing the scientists for several minutes.

M. Demetrovich first regained his self-possession.

"Are you the man who gave my boy this gold?" he asked sharply, indicating the metal with which he was experimenting.

The painted man looked at the heap.

"I gave a boy some gold for some books," he admitted.

"Well, that's the gold all right," snapped Pethwick.

"Did you know the gold you gave him was poisoned?" proceeded the savant severely.

"Poisoned? How was it poisoned?"

"That is for you to tell us."

"I don't know in the least. What effect did it have?"

The man's tones were completely casual, without sign of fear, regret or chagrin at the charge.

"It burned a place on his leg, and last night he slept with it under his head. You see what it did, for yourself."

The stranger looked at Standifer in astonishment and presently ejaculated—

"Is that the same boy?"

"You see you nearly killed him," stated the scientist grimly.

"It was quite accidental; I don't quite

understand it myself. Let me look at his trouble."

He walked over with more curiosity than regret in his manner.

Pethwick watched the fellow with a sharp and extraordinary dislike. It was so sharp that it drove out of his mind the amazing fact of finding this sort of person in such a desolate valley.

Standifer exhibited the burn. The stranger looked at it, touched the spot here and there and finally said, more with the air of an instructor lecturing his inferiors than with that of an Indian talking to white men:

"This is the effect of a metal which I carried with the gold. A metal—I don't know what you call it in your language—possibly you may never have heard of it. Here is some."

He reached in his pocket and drew out a piece of silvery metal as large as a double eagle and dropped it on the table before M. Demetriovich.

The old savant looked at the metal.

"It's radium," he said in a puzzled voice. "It's the largest piece of radium I ever saw—it's the only piece of pure metallic radium I ever saw. It—it's worth quite a fortune—and owned by an Indian!"

Here M. Demetriovich breached his invariably good manners by staring blankly at his guest.

"So you are acquainted with it?" observed the stranger with interest.

"Not in its metallic form. I have extracted its bromide myself. And I've seen radium burns before. I might have known it was a radium burn, but I never dreamed of that metal."

"But that was gold that burned me," complained Standifer.

"That's true," agreed M. Demetriovich, "but, you see, the radiations of radium have the power of settling on any object and producing all the effects of radium itself. This gentleman carried those lumps of gold in his pockets along with about two million dollars' worth of radium." The old savant laughed briefly at the eeriness of the situation. "The gold became charged with radium, burned your leg and whitened your hair. It also affected my electrostat."

THE three men turned to the stranger, who apparently carried fortunes of various metals jingling loose in his pocket.

"Sir," began the savant, "we must apologize to you for our unjust suspicions."

"Do you mean your suspicions were incorrect?" queried the red man.

"I mean," said the old savant with dignity, for this was no way to take an apology, "that we were morally culpable in attributing to you criminal motives without waiting for conclusive evidence."

The stranger smiled at this long sentence.

"I can understand your idea without your speaking each word of it. But the idea itself is very strange." He stroked his chin and some paint rubbed off on his fingers, showing a lighter yellowish skin beneath. Then he laughed. "If you should apologize for every incorrect idea you maintain, gentlemen, I should think your lives would be one long apology."

The superciliousness, the careless disdain in the observation, accentuated Pethwick's antipathy to the man

At that moment the fellow asked—

"Do all your species live in cloth shelters such as these?"

Standifer, who seemed more kindly disposed toward the stranger than the others, explained that tents were temporary and that houses were permanent.

The newcomer continued his smiling scrutiny of everything and at last asked—

"Can't you gentlemen even communicate with each other without using words and sentences?"

He paused, then, as if to simplify what he had said, went on:

"Suppose you, Mr.—Pethwick, desired to communicate with Mr.—" he made a gesture toward the scientist and added—"Mr.—Demetriovich, would you be forced to articulate every word in the sentence?"

"How did you come to know my name?" asked the engineer, surprised. "Have we met before?"

The stranger laughed heartily. "I am sure we have not. I see you desire my name. Well, I have a number. In my country the citizens are numbered. I am sure when your own countries become densely populated, you too will adopt a numerical nomenclature."

"What is your number?" asked Standifer, quite astounded at this, as indeed were his companions.

"1753-12,657,109-654-3."

The secretary laughed.

"It sounds like a cross between a combination lock and a football game. Where do you come from, Mr.—Mr. Three?"

The painted man nodded down the valley casually.

"The name of my country is One, or First," he smiled. "Of course that is a very ancient and unscientific name, but notation must begin somewhere, and it usually begins at home. Now I dare say each one of you live in a country called One—no, I see I am wrong."

Then he repeated in a lower tone, "America —Rumania—Peru—very pretty names but unscientific."

By this time Mr. Three's remarkable feat of calling the men's names and then calling the countries of their birth drove it in on the explorers that they had encountered an amazing man indeed.

"Do you read our thoughts before we speak?" cried Standifer.

Mr. Three nodded easily.

"Certainly; without that all study of the lower animals would be a mere cataloging of actions and habits."

Pethwick wondered if the fellow meant a very delicate insult to begin talking about the study of "lower animals" so promptly when the conversation naturally turned on himself and his companions. He said nothing, but Mr. Three smiled.

But M. Demetriovich was utterly charmed with the vistas of investigation the man's suggestion opened to him.

"Why, that would be wonderful, would it not!" he cried.

"Certainly, without mind-reading comparative psychology is impossible."

"We have professional mind-readers," cried M. Demetriovich with enthusiasm. "I wonder why the psychologists have never thought to have one try to read the minds—say of the higher simians!"

Mr. Three seemed to find all this conversation funny, for he laughed again. But his words were quite serious.

"Besides, this 'mentage,' as we call mind-reading, enables one to converse with every other creature, just as I am talking to you. I take your language forms right out of your own minds and use them. If the creature has no language at all, you still receive its impressions."

BY THIS time even Pethwick, who disliked the fellow almost to the point of hatred, realized that the stranger was wonderful indeed. The engineer decided Mr. Three came from some unknown country, which, he reluctantly admitted to himself, seemed to be more highly cultured than England or America. So, by accepting these facts, Pethwick, in a way, prepared himself not to be surprised at anything.

"Do all your countrymen understand 'mentage' or mind-language?" inquired the engineer.

"It is our national mode of communication. I observe you move your hands when you talk —gestures, you call it. In One, we speak a word now and then to accent our thoughts—verbal gestures. Some of our population, we are nervous, sometimes speak several words, or even complete sentences. Often it is an affectation, unless, of course," he added politely as if to exempt his companions, "their minds are not strong enough to converse without words.

"On the other hand, a few well-placed words make speeches, and especially orations, very impressive. Still, some of our greatest orators never utter a sound. But I consider this too much repression, in fact rather an academic thing to do. What you would call a —a—a highbrow. Thank you, Mr. Standifer, for thinking me the term."

"It would be a great saving of time," mused Pethwick.

"Yes, indeed; in One, a person can present a whole thought, or a whole series of thoughts, in a single flash of the brain, if the thinker's brain is sufficiently strong. It is almost instantaneous."

Standifer smiled blissfully.

"Think of instantaneous sermons! Let's get to that place!"

Pethwick and the professor did not share in Standifer's badinage but sat amazed at this being whose name was a number. The engineer realized the futility of all the questions he could ask. Turn the idea about. Suppose Mr. Three should ask Pethwick to explain American civilization in a casual talk. It would be impossible. So, it was impossible for Mr. Three to give Pethwick much idea of the land of One.

M. Demetriovich took up the questioning.

"Have you been using radium for a long time in One, Mr. Three?"

"For centuries. We are in the midst of the Radium Age. It was developed of the Aluminum Age. All this arose out of a prehistoric Steel Age, a very heavy clumsy metal, I have heard archeologists say."

"You don't mean your mechanical appliances are made of radium?"

"No, radium is our source of power. It has changed our mechanics from molecular energy, such as steam and gasoline. With the aid of radium, we soon developed the enormous force that lies concentrated in the atom. This gives my countrymen unlimited power. It can be derived for any sort of matter, because all matter is composed of atoms and our force is generated through the destruction of atoms."

All this time Mr. Three's voice was growing weaker and weaker until finally he said—

"You will have to excuse me from further conversation, gentlemen; my throat is not accustomed to much talking."

He tapped it with an apologetic smile. As he did so, he glanced about and his eyes lit on the chessboard and men which Pethwick

and M. Demetriovich had been using on the previous evening.

"What is that?"

"A game."

"Who plays it? Ah, M. Demetriovich and Mr. Pethwick. I would not object to a party if you feel disposed."

"Professor and I will try a consultation game against you," suggested Pethwick, moving a stool over to the table.

"I don't understand the game, but if you will just think how the pieces are moved," requested the mind-reader, "I dare say I will soon learn."

The engineer framed the demonstration in his mind and Mr. Three nodded.

"I see. It seems to be a sort of rudimentary stage of a game we call 'cube' in First. However, 'cube' is an entirely mental game, although younger children are given material boards and pieces to assist them in focusing their attention.

"'Cube' has eight boards such as this, superimposed upon one another. Each board has thirty-two pieces on it, thus giving two hundred and fifty-six pieces in all, each player controlling one hundred and twenty-eight. All the major pieces can move up or down, forward or backward, but the pawns can only advance, or go higher. As no real boards are used, the whole play must be kept in mind. Since each player knows what combinations are in the other man's mind, the game becomes a contest of intricacy, that is, until one player grows confused, makes an incoherent move and is checkmated. It is a very pleasant amusement for persons who have nothing more serious to think about."

"I have seen mental chess-players in America," observed Standifer. "But they use only one board. I suppose eight would complicate it. I don't play myself."

The chess-players made no answer to this remark, but set up the men. Mr. Three defeated the scientists' combined skill in a game of ten moves.

AS THIS extraordinary party was brought to a conclusion, Pablo Pasca entered the tent with breakfast on a tray. When the thief saw the guest, he almost dropped the food, but after a moment came on in and placed the dishes on the table. As he did so, he looked meaningly at Pethwick, nodded faintly and retired.

The engineer excused himself and followed the Indian.

He found Pablo in the kitchen tent, shaken out of his ordinary stoicism.

"Do you know who he is, *señor*?" he asked in a low voice.

"His name is Three," said Pethwick, involuntarily guarding his own tone.

"No, I mean, do you know that he is the man who murdered Cesare Ruano?" asked the thief earnestly.

The engineer nodded.

"I'd thought of that. How do you know?"

"How! *Mio Dios*—everything the man has on is Cesare's. Cesare's clothes! Cesare's shoes! On his finger is Cesare's ring—the ring Cesare was saving to be garroted in!"

"I thought somehow he resembled Cesare," nodded Pethwick, "and I knew it was not his face."

"*Ciertamente*, not Cesare, but his murderer," aspirated Pablo excitedly. "I saw this fellow behind this very boulder! This same fellow!"

Pethwick nodded in the sunlight, unaware that Pablo expected him to do anything. Indeed, the engineer was glad he had come out of the tent. Mr. Three's intelligence was oppressive. So now he stood breathing deeply, as if from some struggle. The cliffs, the sunshine, the river, the savor of the kitchen, almost made him doubt the existence in his tent of such a personage as Mr. Three from the land of One. Where in Heaven's name was that land? Did there flourish over behind the Andes somewhere an unknown race of extraordinary arts and sciences who called themselves the First?

And there recurred to him his fancy that if such a nation existed, it must be an offshoot of the old Incan race. Perhaps fugitives flying before the old *conquistadores* found a haven in some spot and there had built up the most advanced civilization upon the face of the earth. The thought was utterly fantastic, and yet it was the only explanation of Mr. Three sitting there in the tent.

"Well?" said Pablo interrogatively.

The engineer came out of his reverie.

"Is that all you wanted to tell me?"

"All. Isn't that enough?"

"Oh, yes."

"Aren't you going to do anything?" demanded Pablo. "He is an Indian. I thought when Indians killed anyone the white men garroted them. *Owk!* Like that!" He pinched his throat and made a disagreeable sound.

"What am I to do?" inquired Pethwick.

"Blessed Virgin! Does not the white man's law work in the Valle de Rio Inferniello? I knock an old man on the head and barely save my neck. This *cholo* kills my good *camarado*, wears his clothes, steals the very ring Cesare meant to be garroted in, and what happens to him? Why, he sits at the table with white men and plays! *Ehue!* A fine justice!"

The engineer hardly knew how to answer this. He stood looking at Pablo rather blankly.

He felt sure an attempt to arrest Mr. Three would prove perilous indeed. On the other hand, Pablo's attitude demanded that Pethwick should act.

Isolated like this, Pethwick was the lone representative of the great Anglo-Saxon convention of justice. It is a strange convention that polices every clime and every tongue. Red, brown, black and yellow men refrain from violence because the white man says—

"Thou shalt not kill!"

Wherever a single unit of the white race is placed, that law inheres in him. Men of all colors come to him and say—

"Murder has been done: now what will you do?"

And he must act.

He must deal out that strange Anglo-Saxon convention called justice, or he must die in the attempt.

That is what the white race means; it is what civilization means. It is not any one white man who has this power of judging and punishing; it is any white man. They are the knight-errants of the earth. Each one must fight, sit in judgment and administer to the best of his ability and conscience, so help him God.

It is the most amazing hegemony on the face of the earth, when one comes to think of it—and the most universally accepted.

Now Pablo was asking Pethwick an account of his stewardship.

Certainly the engineer did not think of the problem in just those terms. He was not conscious of his racial instinct. He thought, in rather loose American fashion, that since Pablo had put it up to him like this he would have to do something.

The Zambo began again. "Look at what I did. I only knocked an old man on the head—"

Pethwick interrupted him with a gesture.

"Pablo, get those handcuffs you and Cesare used to wear and bring 'em to the tent."

"*Si, señor,*" hissed the half-breed gratefully.

Pethwick turned back toward the tent with thorough distaste for his commission. As he entered, Mr. Three glanced up with quizzical eyes and it suddenly flashed on the engineer with a sense of embarrassment that the man from One already knew what was in his thoughts.

THIS was soon proved. Mr. Three nodded his large head smilingly.

"Yes," he said, "Pablo is quite right. Here is the ring."

He held up a hand and displayed an old silver ring engraved in the form of a snake.

M. Demetriovich glanced up at this extraordinary monologue.

"Then you did kill Cesare Ruano?" exclaimed the engineer.

Mr. Three paused a moment, then answered:

"Yes, I did. There is no use going through a long catechism. I may also add, I knew the efflorescence of radium would have some effect on the boy Standifer, but I did not know what."

The old savant stared at the man from One.

"Be careful what you say, Mr. Three. Your confession will place you in jeopardy of the law."

"Then you maintain laws in this country," observed Mr. Three. "What will be the nature of the instruction you will give me?"

"No instruction at all," said Pethwick; "punishment."

"A very antiquated custom. I should think any one could see that criminals need instruction."

At that moment Pablo Pasca appeared in the entrance with the manacles.

"This is hardly the time to enter into an abstract discussion of punishment, Mr. Three," observed Pethwick brusquely. He held the manacles a moment a little self-consciously, then said. "You may consider yourself under arrest."

To Pethwick's surprise, the man from One offered no resistance but peaceably allowed himself to be chained to the chair in which he sat.

He watched the procedure with a faintly amused expression and even leaned over to observe how the anklets were adjusted to his legs.

A certain air of politeness about the Incan at last constrained Pethwick to say—

"You understand, Mr. Three, we are forced to do this—it is the law."

"And you rather dislike me anyway, do you not, Mr Pethwick?" added Mr. Three genially.

The engineer flushed but kept his eyes steadily on Mr. Three's.

"I dislike you, but I dislike to do this more."

After the shackling the captors stood undecidedly. So they had captured the murderer of Cesare Ruano.

"We'll have to carry him before a magistrate," pondered M. Demetriovich. "It is very annoying.

"M. Demetriovich," said Mr. Three, still smiling in his chains, "you have studied physiology?"

"Yes."

"And perhaps vivisection?"

"Certainly."

"Then why all this disturbance about killing a lower animal for scientific ends?"

The old Rumanian looked at Mr. Three steadfastly. "I can not accept your point, Mr.

Three. We are all human beings together, even if Cesare Ruano did not have the culture—"

The rather pointless proceedings were interrupted by a burst of snorting and braying from the corral. Pethwick hurried outside, for the pack-animals were really of more importance than the prisoner. The engineer got out just in time to see Pablo go at full speed toward the enclosure. The Indian had a repeating rifle and no doubt feared the attack of a puma or a jaguar.

On Pethwick's heels came both M. Demetriovich and the white-haired secretary. The valley was strewn with boulders big and little and the men had difficulty in running over broken ground. From afar off Pethwick saw that the down-river side of the corral had been knocked down, and all the llamas and mules came storming out, flying down toward the camp as if the fiends pursued them.

Pablo fired his rifle in the air in an effort to turn them. As he did so, the Zambo reeled as if he had received a mighty but invisible blow. Mules and llamas plunged straight past their staggering master and for a moment Pethwick was afraid they would run him down.

Next moment the engineer heard the secretary and the professor shouting at the top of their voices. He looked around and saw the comb of his tent on fire.

Thought of his prisoner, likely to burn up, sent Pethwick sprinting breathless back toward the tent. As the flames rushed over the oiled canvas Pethwick jerked up the ground-pins of the rear wall and shoved under.

Mr. Three still sat in the chair with arms and legs bound to the posts. He slumped queerly. His hat dropped down on his shirt. Half suffocated, the engineer grabbed up chair, manacles, man and all and rushed into the open.

Once outside, he dropped his burden and began to slap at the fire on his own clothes. The other men began to put out the fire on Mr. Three's garments. At their strokes the garments collapsed.

Inside Cesare Ruano's clothes was an empty human skin cut off at the neck. M. Demetriovich drew it out of the burning rags. It had a cicatrice across its breast from nipple to nipple. It had bullet wounds in legs and buttocks. It tallied exactly with the police description of the marks on the skin of Cesare Ruano.

With colorless faces the men stood studying this ghastly relic of the murderer in the brilliant sunshine.

The pack-animals were just diasppearing down the river valley. A few remaining shreds of cloth burned where their tent once stood. About them the sinister landscape lay empty.

Chapter Five

PROF. Demetriovich held up the gruesome relic.

"Gentlemen," he stated in his matter-of-fact voice, "somebody—something has been stalking us masked in this."

"But why masked?" Standifer's voice was tanged with horror.

"He was stalking us in a human skin, exactly as a hunter stalks a deer in a deer robe," returned M. Demetriovich.

"Then wasn't he a human being?" gasped the secretary.

"It was certainly the devil!" chattered Pablo Pasca with a putty face. "The prefect told us not to come here."

"He knows he is a human being," accented Pethwick irritably, "but he doubts if we are. Did you notice his manner? Did you observe the supercilious, egotistical, conceited air of everything he did or said? He put us down as Darwin's connecting link. We are animals to him. He puts on one of our skins to hunt us down in. Otherwise, he was afraid we would go scampering off from him like rabbits."

"Then he is a fool if he thought white men are animals," declared Pablo angrily.

"Well, he's not exactly a fool either," admitted Pethwick grudgingly, "but every single thing he said was a knock at us. I never heard—" The engineer's angry voice trailed off into an angry silence.

The party stood puzzling over the extraordinary tactics of the man from One. As they buffeted the problem about in their brains, a rabbit dashed almost under their feet bound down the valley. They paid no attention to it.

"I'll give you my guess," offered Pethwick. "I still believe we have encountered one of the ancient Incans. In Prescott's account of them, you notice the highest arts of civilization mingled with the grossest barbarities. A custom of wearing an enemy's skin may have grown up among them, just as our North American Indians used to take scalps. No doubt this fellow was spying on our number. I expect him to return soon with a band and attempt our capture."

"What a curious fate for the DeLong Geographical Expedition," mused the white-haired young secretary.

"Still," objected M. Demetriovich, "it might be a Bolshevist method of spreading terror through the world."

"So, professor, you don't believe after all he put on Cesare's skin to stalk us?" queried Standifer.

"James, I don't know what to think," admitted the savant.

"The whole thing fits in better with my Incan theory," pressed the engineer. "The half-civilized Indians around here, like Pablo and Cesare, could very easily be afraid of some highly developed branch of the Incans, especially if those Incans were seeking victims to sacrifice to the sun. Under such circumstances, it might be necessary to slip on the hide of a half-breed in order to get near the others."

"It would also explain why that man ambushed our party when we entered the valley," added the secretary.

"Thanks, Standifer, for helping me out," said Pethwick. "It would also show why the peons around here call this the Rio Infiernillo and give it such a wide berth."

M. Demetriovich pulled his chin.

"Your theory seems to hang together right now," he admitted. "If you are on the right track, we will have a marvel to report—if we ever get back."

"Then, too," went on Pethwick, encouraged, "since the prefect warned us against the valley, it suggests to me there has been something sinister here for years—long before Bolshevism became a power."

"These are queer theories," laughed Standifer, "one going to the extremely ancient and the other to the extremely modern."

During the latter part of this discussion, an atok, a sort of huge native rodent, slithered down the valley past the scientists, dodging from one boulder to another. Now a Peruvian fox whisked past.

These unusual animals passing within a few minutes proved sufficient to draw Pethwick's attention from the subject under discussion. The engineer looked up the stony stretch and a surprising sight filled his eyes.

The whole valley worked with glimpses of flying animals. Rats, hares, civets, what not, darted from covert to covert. Along the edge of the river slunk a panther, making catlike rushes between hiding-places. The shrill whistle of three frightened deer sounded down the valley.

It seemed as if a wave of fear were depopulating the whole Rio Infiernillo. All the engineer could see was innumerable furtive dodgings. From the dull surface of the river arose a loon, screaming, and it boomed down stream with fear-struck speed. Only one animal fled in the open, a huge black bear with a white muzzle, the ucumari. He was king in the Andes, as the grizzly reigns in the Rockies. He lunged down the middle of the cañon, taking the whole Infernal Valley for his course. He was afraid of nothing in the Sierras—except what was behind him.

The scientists hurried out from in front of the brute and let him lunge by unchallenged. They stared up the burnt valley marveling at this exodus of animals.

Presently, far away against the blackish stones, Pethwick descried what seemed to be yellow fleas hopping among the boulders.

"That must be what made our pack animals break loose!" cried the engineer.

"Wonder what they are?" from the author.

"I say it's the devil making a drive," answered Pablo, crossing himself with fervor.

The animals kept darting past. The distant fleas grew into bugs, then into some sort of animals and at last were defined against the charnel gulch as human beings.

"Jumping Jehosaphat!" cried Standifer. "They are those Incans you were talking about, Pethwick. Scores of 'em! They've come for us!"

The secretary stepped around behind a large boulder that hid everything except his head.

Others of the expedition followed suit, hardly knowing what to believe.

The approaching party were yellow men. Each one carried something in his hand that flashed like metal. They leaped from boulder to boulder in their chase with an amazing activity. The very vicunas themselves that skittered along the craggy sides of the valley did not exhibit a greater agility.

Pablo Pasca, notwithstanding his belief that all this was a great drive of the devil, nevertheless became excited at the passing game. As one speckled deer came shimmering down through the diamond-like sunshine, Pablo determined to beat Satan out of one carcass, so he leveled his rifle for a shot. The author saw it and put his fingers to his ears to dull the report.

At that moment a voice quite close to the party broke the silence with:

"Don't shoot. There must be no holes in the skins."

The word "skins" brought the party around with a start. They were nervous on the topic. The secretary, however, still stood with his fingers in his ears, watching the deer.

On the top of a large boulder, still wearing his look of condescension and amusement, sat the recent prisoner of the expedition, Mr. Three. Since he had flung off Cesare's clothes and skin, the weird creature was without apparel and sat naked in the cold vivid sunshine, his body of a clear yellowish complexion and his large head still painted a coppery red.

IT WAS the most grotesque combination Pethwick could have imagined, but Mr. Three maintained a perfect composure, dig-

nity—and condescension. His painted face had the faintly amused expression of a man watching the antics of, say, some pet goats.

The fellow's body suggested to Pethwick a ripe pear or yellow peach. His hands and feet were disagreeably small—sure sign of ancient and aristocratic blood. He must have slipped right through the manacles the moment his captors had turned their backs. In one hand he held a small metallic rod.

Pethwick stared at the remarkable transformation and finally blurted out—

"Did you break loose from the handcuffs and set fire to our tent?"

"The fire was quite accidental," assured the man from One. "I did it with this focusing-rod when I got rid of your quaint old manacles."

"Focusing-rod," caught up Standifer, for, notwithstanding all he had suffered at the hands of Mr. Three, the pride of a flattered author and the remarkable sale of his books left him with a kindly feeling for the fellow.

"Yes, focusing-rod."

"What does it focus?"

"Wireless power."

"We have transmission of wireless power in America," observed the professor, "but that is certainly the most compact terminal I ever saw."

Mr. Three glanced at the rod in his hand.

"Oh, yes, this is one of the primitive instruments. I fancy this came into use among thinking creatures along with fire, the keystone of the arch and the old-fashioned seventy-two-mile gun. They were important additions to human knowledge, but their discoverers and the dates of their discovery are lost in prehistoric eras."

For a moment Mr. Three sat pensive in the sunshine, his mind dwelling on that misty time in the land of One when some unrecorded genius found out how to focus wireless power with a little metal rod. No doubt to this mysterious man the principle of the rod appeared so simple that any rational creature would know it.

Presently he came out of his reverie and waved his focusing-bar down the valley.

"You men," he directed, "will follow the rest of the quarry down the river—everything must go!"

For a moment the scientists stared at him, not understanding.

"What is it?" inquired Standifer.

"Follow the quarry down the valley and be quick about it," snapped the yellow man.

An indignant flush swept over Pethwick.

"You must have gone crazy, Three. We'll do as we please."

"Why should we go?" inquired M. Demetriovich with his academic suavity.

Mr. Three tapped impatiently with his rod on the boulder.

"So our commander can select specimens to carry to One," he explained briefly.

"Oh, I see," cried Pethwick, somewhat mollified. "He wants us to help him select the animals, as we are naturalists."

For once in their intercourse Mr. Three showed genuine surprise. He sprang to his feet and stared at them.

"You help him select! You!" The gnome broke into the most insulting of laughter. "You bunch of idiots, he is going to select one of you as a specimen to carry to One!" Here he threw off his brief tolerance of opposition and shouted, "Forward, march! I don't want to have to use force!"

For a moment the men stood almost paralyzed with amazement. Mr. Three evidently read their mental state, for he put a hand over his mouth to conceal his grin and maintain his air of grim authority.

Pethwick first organized active resistance. Pablo Pasca still stood with his rifle at ready. Pethwick whispered sharply to the Indian—

"Get him!"

Almost by reflex action, the Zambo swung his rifle on Mr. Three and fired.

At the same moment Pablo staggered backward as if he had received a powerful blow out of the air. His rifle clattered to the stones. At the same instant Pethwick felt a sensation like a strong electric shock. Standifer grunted and clapped a hand to his already wounded leg.

At this act of war the party of scientists threw themselves flat behind boulders. Pethwick adjusted his rifle with hands shaking from his shock and then peered around his shelter for a glimpse of Mr. Three. He saw the yellow man still standing on the boulder. The engineer eased his rifle around unsteadily. The bead of the gun wavered about the big painted head. With a determined effort the engineer settled it on his target. He was just squeezing the trigger when tingling knots rushed through his arms, legs and body, stiffening them, flashing fire in his brain, beating him with a thousand prickly hammers. It was an electric shock. He flattened under it, squirming and twisting.

The moment his thoughts of opposition vanished in pain the shock ceased.

All three white men and the Indian lay motionless. The only sound Pethwick could hear was an occasional groan from Standifer and the faint patter of passing animals.

A ray of sardonic amusement fluttered through the engineer's dizzy brain—the De-Long Geographical Expedition as a curious species of lower animals.

Sudden hearty laughter from the nearby boulder told the engineer that Mr. Three had caught the jest and was enjoying it. Pethwick flushed angrily.

AFTER this convincing contest with the focusing-rod the expedition abandoned resistance and surrendered themselves as prisoners of war, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say prisoners of science.

Although Pablo had shot at Mr. Three, that strange being regarded it no more than if a cat had scratched at him. Instead of being angry, he really tried to comfort the men. He told them only one of their number would be taken as a specimen to the land of One: the person chosen would be retained alive and, if he proved tractable, he would undoubtedly be allowed to run at large within certain limits and might be taught simple tricks wherewith to amuse the visitors at the zoo; such as playing a simple game of chess on one board.

This may or may not have been a sarcastic fling at the feeble game of chess which Pethwick and M. Demetriovich had just played; at any rate the thought of playing endless games of chess through the bars of a zoological cage filled the engineer with nausea. No doubt on one side of him would be a monkey begging for peanuts and on the other a surly orang. For Pethwick did not doubt the specimen selected would be classed among the simians.

As they walked along the engineer thought up a new line of defense. He began to threaten Mr. Three with the American Army and Navy. He told the yellow man this expedition was American and their capture would be no small affair. They were a famous scientific body. They would be missed. Their abduction would mean a war between the land of One and the whole League of Nations.

At this Mr. Three interrupted incredulously—

"Do you creatures really compose a scientific body?"

Pethwick was so cut by the remark that he stopped talking and walked along in silence.

The professor plied his captor with many questions. He discovered that the men from One had a portable furnace and were extracting radium from outcrops of pitchblende in the valley. The mysterious burned places which Pethwick had noted in his journal were spots where the furnace had been operated. The strange lights which the expedition had seen on several occasions were the men moving the furnace from one place to another. Mr. Three explained that they always moved the furnace at night; it was diffcult to do this during the day because the sun's rays created an etheric storm.

The yellow man's conversation entertained the white men nothwithstanding their uncertain fate. Pablo Pasca, however, trembled on the verge of collapse. He knew he was in the hands of the imps of satan. Now and then Pethwick heard him groan.

"Oh, Mother of Heaven! Oh, if I could get back to the garrote! Poor Cesare Ruano, in torment without his skin—or the ring he meant to be garroted in!"

Animals still rushed past the party and behind them came the yellow beaters, scaring up the game.

It was useless for anything to hide from these terrible men with their focusing-rods. Evidently they could sense an animal's fright and locate it as an ordinary man can locate a sound. As soon as they found something in a covert, a slight electric shock sent it headlong after the other animals.

For the first time in his life Pethwick felt some kinship for the lower animals. He too was in the *battue*, one with the foxes and rabbits that fluttered past him. For ages man had slaughtered the lower animals exactly as the men from One were doing now.

And just as man had annihilated the bison, the penguin, the dodo, so no doubt this new and more powerful race from One would exterminate man and his cities, his works of art and his sciences. The vision of a charnel world painted itself on his depressed imagination—a wiping out of existing races and a repeopling by these yellow Incans. Compared to such a conflict the late world war would be trivial.

* * *

Amid this day-dream of Armageddon, the engineer heard M. Demetriovich ejaculate to himself—

"So it is a German Bolshevist undertaking after all. There's a Zeppelin!"

Pethwick looked up suddenly. The prisoners had rounded a turn in the valley. Not more than three hundred yards distant rose an enormous structure in the shape of a Zeppelin. It required a second glance to observe this fact, as the huge creation stood on its end instead of lying horizontal as do the ordinary flying-ships.

Instead of being made of cloth, this Zeppelin had a skin of white metal, no doubt aluminum. Indeed, for the first time a dirigible had been constructed that had the stanchness and air-worthiness that deserved the name ship. This was no mere bubble of varnished cloth.

It was enormous. It arose between seven hundred and seven hundred and fifty feet high, an amazing skyscraper of silver whose fulgor was enhanced by the dark and melancholy background of the Infernal Valley.

The immense vessel rested on its stern, which tapered down to perhaps forty feet in diameter. It was shored up with long metal rods anchored in the earth. The rods, some hundred feet long, were inserted in the airship just where its great barrel began to taper to its stern.

Five hundred feet up the side of the cylinder Pethwick noticed the controlling planes, which looked exceedingly small for the vast bulk they were designed to pilot. When the engineer pointed these out to the professor, M. Demetriovich seemed surprised.

"Do you realise, Pethwick, what their small size indicates? The speed of this ship through the air must be prodigious if these tiny controls grip the air with sufficient leverage to direct this monster."

Then the old scientist went on to commend the novel idea of landing the dirigible on her stern. It did away with wide maneuvering to gain altitude. This aluminum dirigible could drop into a hole slightly larger than her own diameter and launch herself out of it straight at the sky. It was an admirable stroke.

Workmen dotted the vessel's sides, scrubbing the bright skin as assiduously as a crew painting a man-of-war. Pethwick could distinguish this scrubbing force up for two or three hundred feet.

The organization of the crew seemed cast along military lines. Small squads of men or soldiers marched in exact ranks and files over the valley to gather up the animals stunned by the focusing-rods.

At first Pethwick had not observed these animals, but a more careful look showed him a number of specimens that had been struck down as they passed the ship. The big-headed yellow men were collecting these in cages, evidently for exhibition purposes when they returned to the extraordinary land from which they came. The slaughter had not been wasteful. Only one member of each species of animal had been taken.

The yellow men worked at top speed and were plainly under the continual barked orders of soldiery, but oddly enough not a sound was heard. The whole control was mental. The silence gave Pethwick the strange impression that he was looking at a gigantic cinema.

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A MOVEMENT behind the white men caused them to look around. A file of yellow soldiers was moving toward the dirigible, coming from the direction of their burned camp up the valley. These men bore the mounted skeletons which the DeLong Geographical Expedition had observed when they first entered the strange valley of the Rio Infiernillo.

The removal of these objects suggested to Pethwick that the men from One and their superdirigible would soon sail from the valley. A great curiosity to see the departure seized the engineer. He looked for the big driving propellers which he thought must draw the ship, but he could see none.

At that moment four soldiers with a large metal cage approached the DeLong Geographical party. At the same time, on one of the upper rounds of the airship, some seventy-five feet above the base, appeared a yellow man with a peculiar scintillating star fixed to his big yellow head. This personage looked directly toward the explorers but said nothing.

When he looked Mr. Three drew himself up and saluted in military fashion.

Then evidently for the benefit of his captors, Mr. Three answered aloud the mental questions which his superior must have put to him. Here are the words of the one-sided conversation:

"Yes, sir."

"No, sir."

"Ordinary ruby-blooded animals, sir, with intelligence somewhat higher than monkeys, sir."

"They complicate their simple thoughts exactly as monkeys do, sir—by chattering."

"They are absolutely insensible to all mental vibrations, sir, more completely so than the four-legged animals."

"I would suggest you take all five. They will prove very amusing, sir, in the national zoo. Their attempts to deceive each other and to deceive even me, sir, are as good as a farce. I believe you will find them much more humorous than chimpanzees or the ordinary monkeys, sir."

"Sorry you can't. In that case I suggest we take the brown one. His color is the nearest human. Then, too, he has the best physique. None of them have any minds to speak of."

"Very well, sir."

Here Mr. Three saluted stiffly and directed the four workmen with the cage toward Pablo Pasca.

As the laborers lowered their cage and started for the half-breed Pablo's eyes almost started from his head. He whirled to run but seemed to realize the hopelessness of trying to escape from the amazing agility of the men from One. Next moment he whipped out a knife and dashed into the midst of his assailants, slashing and stabbing like one possessed.

But the soldiers of One had feline agility. They dodged, whipped under his blows like game-cocks. One leaped straight over the heads of his comrades and landed headlong on the Zambo. It was an unfortunate leap. Pablo's blade caught him in the shoulder and a dark liquid squirted out.

In the instant of withdrawing the blade, the yellow men seized the half-breed's arms and legs. They went down with the Zambo in a struggling pile. Pablo kicked, bit, twisted his knife with a wrist movement, trying to cut something. But the yellow men worked swiftly and methodically.

"Quick!" commanded Mr. Three. "We must start in four minutes!" Then, in answer to some question the yellow soldiers thought to him, "I can't use my focusing-rod. It might destroy what little mind he has."

A moment later the little yellow men got to their feet with the ex-thief hanging between them by his legs and arms. The poor fellow turned an agonized face to Pethwick.

"Señor! Señor!" he screamed. "Save me! Save poor Pablo! Oh, Holy Mary! Sacred Mother! Señor, Señor Pethwick!"

His voice rose to a screech. Blood trickled from his nostrils. His face was white from fear.

Pethwick stared with wide eyes at the struggle. The injustice of this capture for scientific purposes thundered at the American's heart. Pethwick was a white man, of that race which deals justice among weaker men and carries out its judgments with its life.

At Pablo's shriek of despair something seemed to snap in Pethwick's head. He hesitated a second, then lunged into the victorious yellow men.

He never reached them. A wave of flame seemed to lap around him. Then came blackness.

WHEN Pethwick revived, there were no more yellow men in sight. The great shining dirigible stood entirely closed and apparently lifeless. The sun was setting and its rays filled the great charnel valley with a bloody light. The dirigible looked like an enormous red waterstand. In a few minutes the lower half of the great ship was purple in shadow while the upper half turned a deeper red. The silence was absolute. The three white men stood staring at the strange scene.

Quite suddenly from where the stern of the dirigible nested on the ground there broke

out a light of insufferable brilliancy. A luminous gas seemed to boil out in whirls of furious brightness. It spread everywhere, and in its radiance the great ship stood out once more in brilliant silver from stem to stern.

In that fulgor Pethwick saw the restraining rods cast off, and the dirigible from the land of One mounted straight into the green heart of the evening sky.

The moment it struck full sunlight at a height of five hundred yards it seemed caught in some tremendously strong wind, for it moved eastward at a velocity that increased by prodigious bounds. Within half a minute its light was reduced from the terrific glare of a furnace to a glow of a headlight, and then to a radiance like that of a shooting star against the darkening eastern sky.

As the watchers followed it with their eyes a strange thing happened. That white light turned violet, then indigo, green, yellow, orange and red, and so faded out.

In the Valley de Rio Infiernillo lingered a phosphorescent mist that told of the First men's passing.

"Gentlemen," quavered M. Demetriovich, "I believe we have on us the residual emanations of radium. It will likely kill us. Let us go down to the river, now, and wash it off."

The three men set out, stumbling through the darkness.

They waded into the black waters of the Infernal River and began scrubbing each other furiously, trying to rid themselves of this dangerous luminosity. High above them it still shimmered from cliff and crag. Presently this faded out and there reigned complete darkness and complete silence.

* * *

On the following morning, when the De-Long Geographical Expedition was about to start back for civilization, they saw on the scene of the conflict between Pablo and the yellow soldiers, where the half-breed had stabbed his captors, a number of dark-green stains. On analysis this green also proved to be chlorophyll.

A COMMUNICATION FROM GILBERT H. DELONG, PRESIDENT OF THE DELONG GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY, TO THE TRUSTEES OF THE NOBEL PRIZE FOUNDATION, STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN.

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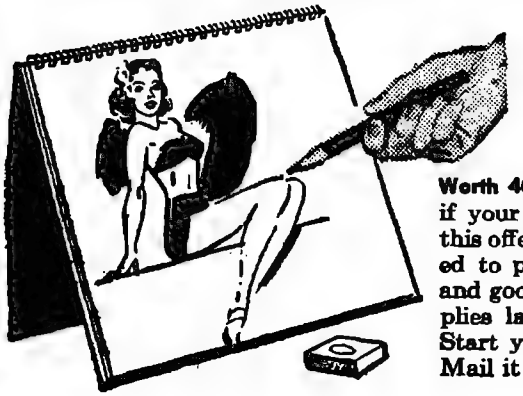

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

Sirs: It is my privilege to bring to your attention the extraordinary journal of the DeLong Geographical Expedition into the unmapped region of Peru, in the department of Ayacucho, known as the Valle de Rio Infiernillo.

Enclosed with this journal is M. Demetriovich's able presentation of the theory that the dirigible observed in that valley was operated by the Bolshevist government of either Austria or Russia.

Also enclosed is the monograph of Mr. Herbert M. Pethwick, C.E., who presents a most interesting speculation tending to prove that the strange aircraft was a development made independently of the known civilized world by an offshoot of the ancient Incan race, depatriated by the Spaniards in 1533 A.D.

To my mind, both of these hypotheses, although brilliantly maintained, fail to take into consideration two highly significant facts which are set forth but not greatly stressed in the record of the expedition as kept by Mr. James B. Standifer, Sec.

These two facts are, first, the serial number which served as a name for the man from One, and the other fact, that in both cases where a man from One was wounded he bled what for want of a better term must be called chlorophyllaceous blood.

From few other writers than Mr. Standifer would I accept so bizarre a statement of fact, but his power of exact and minute observation is so well attested by his well-known work, "Reindeer in Iceland," that I dare not question his strict adherence to truth.

The phenomena set forth in the journal happened. That is beyond cavil. The problem for the scientific world is their interpretation.

In handling this problem, I shall not only assume that the journal is accurate, but I shall further assume that the being known in the record as Mr. Three told the precise truth

I have every confidence in Mr. Three's probity for several reasons. First, he has no motive for prevarication. Second, a man who habitually communicates with his fellows by telepathy would not be accustomed to falsehood, since falsehood is physically impossible when a man's mind lies before his companions like an open book. Third, to a man habitually accustomed to truth, lying is a difficult and uncongenial labor. In brief, lying is like any other art; it requires practise to do it well.

In regard to the serial number, both of the above mentioned writers apparently fail to see the enormous problem it poses. As for the chlorophyllaceous blood, our authors pass it with a vague surmise that somehow it is used in extracting gold, when the whole

object of the expedition, according to Mr. Three, was not gold but radium.

Because my esteemed colleagues neglect these two critical points, their whole theories, as ably and ingeniously defended as they are, to my mind collapse into mere sophisms.

In the brief analysis herewith presented I shall touch on a number of points, among which the questions evoked by the serial number and the chlorophyll blood will be noticed in their proper places.

First, then, Mr. Three himself states that the object of the expedition was the extraction of radium from the pitchblende in the Infernal Valley. The use the men from One made of this radium was demonstrated at the departure of the dirigible, for that vessel must have been propelled by the emanations of radium. According to the description of Mr. Standifer, the ship used no screw propellers or tractors, but a powerful emanation of radium from under its stern shot the great metal cylinder upward as power propels a sky rocket.

That radium would possess such power is well known. It has been calculated that two pounds of radium would possess sufficient force to swing the earth out of its orbit.

With such power the airship would be capable of enormous speed. A high speed was guessed by M. Demetriovich when he observed the small controlling-plane. However, the vastness of this speed was demonstrated by Mr. Standifer in the last paragraph of his account, by his curious observation that the light from the airship, as seen against the evening sky, turned violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, red and then was lost. In other words it ran through the whole spectrum from the most rapid to the lowest vibrations per second and then vanished.

What is the meaning of this significant detail?

Allow me to recall an analogy in sound. The tone of a bell on a train departing at high speed becomes lower in pitch. This is because the air vibrations reach the ear at longer intervals.

Apply that to the change of light observed on the airship. Then the vessel must have been withdrawing at such a speed that it lowered the "pitch" of light vibrations from white to red and finally cancelled its light in blackness.

The only conclusion to be drawn from this is that at the time of the light's extinction, the mysterious cylinder was hurtling through space at the speed of light itself; that is to say, at a speed of one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles per second.

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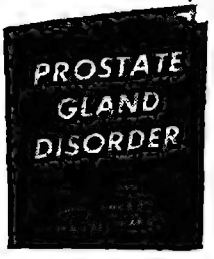

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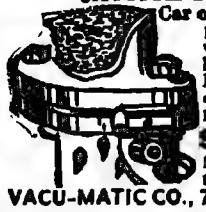

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Observe that I say, "space," not air. Why? In the first place such a speed in air would fuse any metal. But there is another and a better reason.

It requires the average human eye one-twentieth of a second to perceive a color change. If Mr. Standifer had observed these color changes at the highest possible nerve rate, the operation would have required seven-twentieths of a second. Let us assume it required half a second. During that interval the cylinder would have traversed, at the speed of light, ninety-three thousand miles in a straight line. That is more than eleven times the diameter of this globe. Therefore it was far outside of our atmosphere. Also it proves the mysterious vessel was not bound for Austria or Russia. It was leaving the earth.

How was this velocity attained? I submit by the reaction of radium upon sunlight.

As every schoolboy knows, the drift of a comet's tail is caused by the pressure of light. As soon as this airship arose to the height of about five hundred yards in sunlight, it began to drift eastward with a rapidly increasing velocity. In other words, the metal skin of the ship, which Mr. Pethwick took for aluminum, was probably a much lighter metal—a metal so light that it was capable of being bufleted along in the surf of sunlight. Now if the ship were propelled merely on the barbs of sunbeams, it would have attained the velocity of light. But the velocity of radium emanations is one-fifteenth that of light. So by running down the light current, and allowing the radium to react against the sunbeams, a speed of one and one-fifteenth the velocity of light might be generated; that is one hundred and ninety-eight thousand miles per second.

Such speed would admit of inter-planetary travel.

However, it is probable the men from One could accelerate the radiation from radium by electrical or chemical means. They may have learned to boil the metal as men boil water. In such case the pressure of its radiation would be vastly increased, and with it the possible speed of the ship. This gives an unknown and problematical power of transition far beyond the velocity of light. At such rate a journey even to one of the fixed stars would be within the realm of possibility.

WE MAY therefore with prudence hypothesize that the mysterious ether ship observed in the valley of the Rio Infiernillo was an interstellar voyager stopping by the earth as a coaling-port to refuel with radium.

However, as it is improbable that the ether ship was going beyond the confines of

our solar system, a speculation as to what planet the men from One were bound may be reached by noting the day and the hour the ship sailed from the earth.

As our earth swings around the ecliptic, it would be possible for interplanetary mariners to obtain a favorable current of sunlight in any direction. No doubt the navigator of the ether ship was bound for one of the planets in opposition to the sun at the time of the ship's departure. That is to say the yellow men were sailing for either Neptune or Jupiter.

That the men were returning to some planet much larger than the earth is suggested by their small size and extraordinary agility. No doubt these men found the gravitation of the earth slight compared with the attraction to which they were accustomed. This fact gave them extraordinary vigor.

Now let us consider the serial number that formed Mr. Three's name. It was 1753-12,-657,109-654-3. This gives rise to a most interesting speculation.

The probable number of units contained in a series, when any serial number is given, is computed by multiplying together the component parts of the serial number.

For instance, if one has two series of twelve each, the whole number of objects would be twenty-four. If one had six major series of two sub-series of twelve each, the total number of units would be 144.

Applying this idea to Mr. Three's serial number, one would find the total probable population of Jupiter, or the land of One, by multiplying the component parts of his number together. This reached the enormous product of 14,514,894,498,356. That is to say, fourteen and one half quadrillions.

This uttterly quashes the Incan hypothesis. There is not room in South America for fourteen and a half quadrillion people—there is not room on the globe for such a number. That, in fact, is the probable population of either Neptune or Jupiter. For sake of simplicity we will assume it is Jupiter.

No wonder, then, with such an inconceivable population, the inhabitants of Jupiter are militarized. No wonder they suggested Bolshevism to M. Demetriovich.

With such masses of life, all other species of animal are probably extinct. This would explain why the Jovians were so eager to capture specimens of living animals. They desired specimens of fauna as well as radium.

The last point in the record, the chlorophyllaceous blood, has been to me the most difficult to find any analogy for in our terrestrial experience.

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Chlorophyll is the coloring matter in plants. It possesses the power of utilizing energy directly from sunlight. There is no reason to doubt that in the veins of the Jovians it still retains that peculiar power.

With such an extraordinary fluid in his veins, it might be possible for a Jovian to stand in the sunshine and to obtain from it energy and strength, just as a human being obtains energy and strength by eating vegetables that have stood in the sunshine.

In fact, the first method is no more amazing than the second. If, indeed, there be a difference, undoubtedly our human method is the more fantastic. The idea of obtaining energy from sunshine, not by standing in it, as anyone would suppose, but by eating something else that has stood in it, is grotesque, to the verge of madness.

Let us pursue that thought. No doubt in a concourse of fourteen and a half quadrillion inhabitants space would be so dear that there would be no vacant or tillable land. Therefor on Jupiter every man must absorb whatever sunshine he received. There would be no such thing as eating.

This accounts for the amazement of Mr. Three at seeing Standifer eat his lunch.

To put the same idea in another form—the crew of the ether ship were flora, not fauna.

This accounts for the yellow, pear-like texture of their skins. No doubt the young Jovians are green in color. It would also explain why Mr. Three was entirely without anger when attacked and without pity for Pablo's pleadings, or for Standifer when he was burned, or for Ruano when he was murdered.

Anger, pity, love and hatred are the emotional traits of the mammalia. They have been developed through epochs of maternal protection. It is not developed in plants.

Mr. Three was a plant.

It would also explain why Mr. Three took only one animal of each species, instead of a male and a female.

Sex is perhaps unknown on Jupiter. Mr. Three was perhaps expecting his animals to bud or sprout.

THE LAST question to be broached is, How is it possible for plant life to possess mobility?

I wish to recall to the inquirer that here on our own globe the spores of the algae and other plants of that order have the power of swimming freely in the sea. Still, they are plants—plants just as mobile as fishes. They become stationary only at a later stage of their development.

THE GREEN SPLOTCHES

Now, if for some reason these algae spores could retain their mobility, the result would be a walking, swimming or crawling plant.

The line between animal and plant life has never been clearly drawn. It seems mere fortuity that the first forebear of animal life swam about and caught its sustenance by enveloping it in its gelatinous droplet, rather than by adhering to a reef and drawing its energy directly from the sun.

If that far-off protozoa had clung to the reef, the reader of this paragraph might have been a sycamore or a tamarind—he would not have been a man.

Now Mr. Three's forefather evidently crawled out of the sea into the sunshine but found nothing to envelop; therefore he followed the lip of the Jovian tide up and down, drawing his energy from the sun's rays. The result was a walking vegetable—in short, Mr. Three.

However, gentlemen of the Nobel Prize Foundation, it is not to press the views of the writer that this note was written, but to offer for your consideration as candidates for the fifty thousand dollar Nobel Prize for the year 1920 the names of:

Demetrios Z. Demetriovich, Herbert M. Pethwick and James B. Standifer.

One of the five prizes for 1920 will be awarded to the man or group of men who have done the greatest service for the advancement of human knowledge during the year.

These men, by their observations taken at the peril of their lives, have blazed new avenues for the use of radium. Their journal suggests the feasibility of the universal use of telepathy, a development now confined to a few adepts and belittled by the unthinking. Their discoveries reveal the possibilities of interplanetary travel and the vast commercial emoluments such a trade would possess. Their journal suggests to the ambitious soul of man a step beyond world citizenship, and that is stellar citizenship. It is a great step and will profoundly modify human thought.

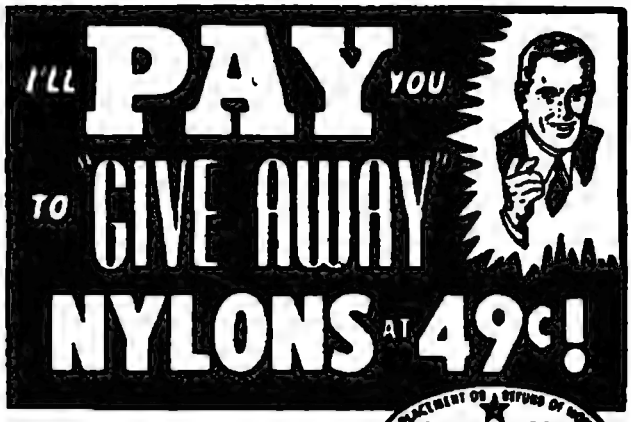
In the past, gentlemen, epoch-making discoveries have been too often rewarded by Bridewell or Bedlam; it is gratifying to know that we have reached a stage of civilization where the benefactors of their race receive instead honor and emolument.

GILBERT H. DE LONG.

New York City,
May, 1920.

NOTE BY TRANSCRIBER: It may interest the reader to know that the Nobel Prize was awarded to Dr. Gilbert H. DeLong for the series of brilliant inductions set forth above.

—T.S. ■ ■ ■



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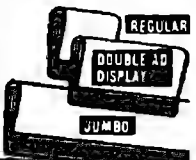

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FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES

(Continued from page 10)

NOTICE TO FANS

I am attempting to form an APA. Name is Cosmic APA. I had to leave the SAPS and FAPA writing lists because I couldn't multilith my fanzine, but now I think I can pub enough for this little (20) APA.

M. McNeil.

2010 McClendon,
Houston 25, Texas.

CAN YOU HELP?

I would be very grateful to you or your readers if you could send me two back copies of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*. The first one was published sometime in 1946, and contains Jack London's "Beyond These Walls". This was the best, in my mind, of the many fine stories in your magazine, and I would like to re-read it. The other issue was the one for October, 1951, in which "Rebirth" appeared. In Canada it is difficult enough to buy the current issue.

A. Pancoe.

815 Martin Ave.,
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

Editor's Note: The story by Jack London which was published was "The Star Rover", which dealt with a prisoner—We have published others, but I think this is the one you want. Can any of the readers help Mr. Pancoe?

COMPLAINT

Referring you to the July edition of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries*, in which you printed "The War of the Worlds" by H. G. Wells: I am an ardent admirer of the writings of author Wells and am pleased that you should print his works in cheaper editions so that greater numbers of his admirers can read his works. However, I did not at all appreciate the cover you slapped on the magazine. I'm sure Mr. Wells saw none of the sights you wish to depict on the covers of your publications.

Just what publishers are trying to do to the works of authors by their cover-making attempts is beyond me. I made use of the magazine for the reason that it contained a work of Wells, and not for the cover of the magazine. Perhaps authors should demand just which pictures are to be placed on publications of their works. And were they to demand such pictures as are usually seen on the "pulp" mags, their writings would probably not lift the world's moral standards.

Eugene H. Hornung.

Marathon, Wis.

STUPENDOUS!

I just thought once again I would drop you a line to tell you of the swell job you are doing. I see by the "Readers' Viewpoint" your work couldn't be praised more highly.

The cover for "The Death Maker" is stupendous! Those eyes! Between Finlay and

THE READERS' VIEWPOINT

Lawrence, I believe you have the greatest artists today! They must cost Popular Publications a pretty penny.

Once again I must thank you for publishing my letter. Through you, I have many pen pals and have even joined a fan club. An awful lot of fun, and it occupies my mind more than anything else.

I am about halfway through "The Death Maker." I surely aim to finish it tonight, but I felt I had to write.

Thanks again.

A Fan Forever,
ARLOA BEAL.

Hotchkiss, Colorado.
P. S. My boy friend is even an F.F.M. fan now!

SHE MAKES AN OFFER!

"The Death Maker" was a "lulu." I enjoyed the "Valley of Eyes Unseen", in the previous issue, much more, though. I'm sort of keen on Tibet and the Orient stories.

I've quite a few back issues of F.F.M. and others (of 1950 and 1951 only) that I will be glad to give anyone that cares for them. All I ask is that you pay the postage for them, and please use commemorative stamps.

Will answer all inquiries.

Most sincerely,
BARBARA WITEK.

31 Montgomery St.,
Westfield, Mass.

SUPERB FANTASY

My pet pixy informed me with a quiet turn of his head that it was due time I inscribed a wee epistle to you. Having just returned from Lilliput myself, I feel rather odd to say the least in writing you. However, Hello, quite a self-important Lilliputian, requests that I do since he has read your recent issue of F.F.M. and declares it truly up to the royal Lilliputian standards of literature. I myself must remark that Small's (Hello says that his name should be Lilliputaus) masterpiece of the macabre is excellent to say the least—superb fantasy. Reminds me of the tale you published some years ago, "The Man Who Was Thursday." Oh, the Olympic glory of it all.

Mr. Gilbert Collins may be quite certain that he is very famous and his works are well read in Lilliput (Hello quite assures me). Hello also tells me that he rather likes the old style, size and form of *Famous Fantastic Mysteries;* plus the fact that it makes it seem more human, not so dwarf-like.

After writing you for Hello, I shall now mount my dziggetai and summon my faithful Syak, then off we shall go—yes, Hello, too, with a tally ho.

Fantastically yours,
RICHARD Z. WARD.

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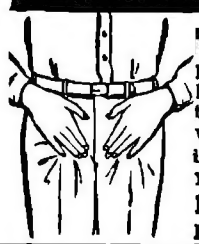

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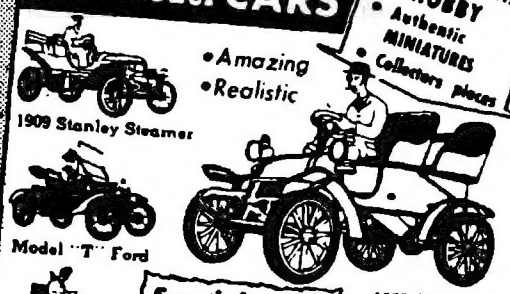

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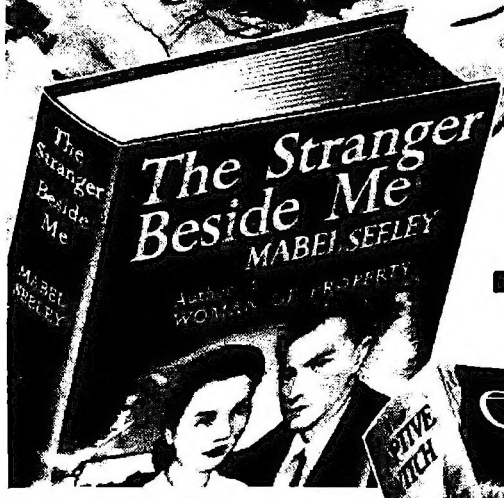

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